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Christ our life

SERMONS

CHRIST OUR LIFE

SERMONS

BY

V. M. OLYPHANT

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Part First.

I.

THE PRINCIPAL THING.

SERMONS.

I.

THE PRINCIPAL THING.

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom
PROVERBS iv. 7.

THE author of the Book of Proverbs was one to whom God had given large measures of wisdom and knowledge, and these had been given under such circumstances and conditions that the hand of God was plainly apparent in it. Solomon had been called to the throne at an early age, and, recognizing the responsibilities which rested upon him in the government of so great a people, had obeyed the command of the Lord to ask what he would by asking for wisdom. This choice met the approval of God, and the request was granted. We see then the influence of these events in shaping the teaching of Solomon. His gifts were unmistakably God-given. He could never recur to the scenes of his early life without having this fact impressed upon him. It serves also to show us why the admonitions of

Solomon are given to us as teachings of wisdom. Yet we are not to conclude from this that the great intellectual gifts of Solomon are those which he sets before us as the chief objects of pursuit, but rather are we taught by one of varied and extensive mental ability to judge rightly what is wisdom. The fame and reputation of Solomon had spread among the surrounding nations. Riches and honor and wisdom combined held the attention of those who came in contact with him. Was it not probable that under such circumstances men would look more on the external than the internal, valuing the pomp and glitter of Solomon's rule, and attracted by the display of his wisdom, without discerning the basis on which it rested? To all such the teaching of Solomon would come to disabuse their minds of the impression which the outward exhibition of his genius had occasioned. They would be reminded that in so far as they considered him fortunate, according to the distance which separated him from common men, they were mistaken. That, however much they might lay stress on his wisdom and riches, yet the highest wisdom was within the reach of all, and that was of more value than riches. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom," is the command which Solomon lays upon us. Were these the words of an enthusiast who, in his zeal for the private work which he had engaged in, calls upon all to abandon their own pursuits that they might

follow him, there would be little disposition to yield obedience; or were the obedience referred to a wide, all-embracing knowledge of the events of history or the facts of nature, it would be idle to make it the basis of an appeal to all men. But such is not the case. Solomon is directing our attention away from all misconceptions of wisdom in which the human mind is tempted to dwell, to that which is the highest wisdom; he urges its importance, and presses on us its acquirement. Let us consider our text, then, from these three standpoints: The nature of wisdom, its value, and how it may be gained.

The wisdom mentioned in our text does not relate to the extent of our knowledge, but to its kind. It is not an expansion of learning already gained, but attention to the sphere of life and conduct which is demanded. It is that wisdom of which the fear of the Lord is the beginning. It has its seat in the heart. This is the repeated declaration of the Word of God. Not only is it distinctly stated in the book from which our text is taken, but we find it in the Book of Psalms. And in Job we read, "Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom." To Solomon, indeed, there was one living illustration of the truth of his teaching to which he could recur, — the memory of a father whose heart was perfect toward the Lord his God; but the life of David is open to us, as it was to him, and we have further means of apprehending this truth in the history of men who

lived after Solomon, and some of them his descendants. But this fear of the Lord is no prerogative of princes. With the lowly is wisdom, and it is often involved in cherishing this fear of the Lord that advancement which a mere worldly wisdom might urge upon us must be foregone. Fear of the Lord must be held to as a reality, if held to at all. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

Thus are we brought to see the nature of wisdom. It expresses itself in a continued, unwavering faith. It knows no change of time or circumstance. And it is no mystical or sentimental affection of the mind which is demanded. Fear of the Lord must have its issue in the life. Let us beware of the error which would substitute a vague, shadowy, indefinable relation toward God for that real trust which exhibits itself in the keeping of the explicit commandments of His Word. Here again Solomon guides us. He closely relates the commandments of God with the part of wisdom. There is no compromise with the teaching of the decalogue. Wisdom has a plain, practical way of guiding us. It gives a high place to the commandments which it imposes upon the outward life, yet it does not separate them from their relation to God; and by their means we are enabled to form a definite conception of the kind of service which wisdom requires, — what trust in God

calls upon us to do. We are not left to find out what is acceptable to God; we are not placed upon the edge of a trackless forest with only a disposition to break through its thick undergrowth, and make our way unaided through its unexplored depths, but a path is made plain for us. Directions are given us which, if followed, will carry us safely through and bring us at last to the light. There is the fear of the Lord made plain to us. Reliance on Him is like the reliance we place in our fellowmen, and obeying Him is yielding to His definite commands. "Great is the mystery of godliness," says the apostle; but it is the mystery of the work that God has done for man to which he refers. But the work which God requires of man is so plainly set forth that he who runs may read.

Secondly, we learn from the text that wisdom is the principal thing. Positively and negatively is this truth brought out. All the terms which are used to express what men most desire — riches, health, long life — are pressed into service to denote the value of wisdom; while, on the other hand, the sure destruction of those who reject wisdom is expressed with equal clearness. Since the days of Solomon there has been no change in the truth of His teaching. Now, as then, obedience to God brings reward, and disobedience punishment. There is no middle ground. Wisdom calls us to life; reject it, and we follow the road which leads to

death. And it is to be remembered that it is the temporal consequence of sin which is referred to. As in the Book of Ecclesiastes we learn the unsatisfactory result of any course of pleasure pursued without reference to God, so here we learn the deadly result in time of a life which is lived in defiance of divine law. It is not necessary to project the shadow of everlasting punishment upon the page to give point to the lesson. Godliness hath promise of the life which now is. This is the truth which is enforced by the voice of wisdom, and it is a truth met with continually in Old Testament history. Moses, Joshua, and David, no less than Solomon, bear witness either in life or teaching to the folly of sin, and it is met with at every turn in the history of Israel as a people. Thus it is that every generation is liable to the same weakness and requires the same instruction. Line upon line, precept upon precept is needed to keep before us the unchangeableness of the laws of God. Is it not time that we learned that human nature is the same throughout history? We are not different from the generations which have preceded us. The evil nature with which they had to contend is in us. The same struggle is before us; the same rules of warfare necessarily apply. Hence it is that from God on Sinai, and from the preacher of Ecclesiastes the conclusion of the whole matter is the same, "Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty

of man." And now that duty and self-interest have been shown by long experience to lie along the same lines, what explanation can we furnish for the fact that both are so readily neglected? Is it to be accounted for on any other ground than that of improvidence or folly? Thou fool, was the sentence passed by our Lord upon the rich man, whose soul rested only on food and drink and merriment, and such will be the sentence on all who imitate him. Yet is there not a deeper reason which lies at the basis of this folly, which arises from the very nature of the principle of obedience? It is fully shown us in the illustration: "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit; a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

If the principle be lacking, there will be no manifestation of it. If we begin with duty, with the fear and love of God, we shall end by gaining all that imagination can conceive of those things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. Reverse the order; set our hearts upon our own good first, and we pass under the sentence, "He that seeketh his life shall lose it."

It is well that we should keep steadfastly in mind this relation between faith in God and obedience to Him. Faith is the only sure foundation of works. This is the contested ground to-day. We meet with a general and ready acquiescence in

affirming that the well-being and happiness of men is coincident with the observance of the requirements of Scripture. It is only when we assert the ground of this observance that we encounter opposition. The old motives which spring from a belief in the lost condition of the race and their salvation through Christ are held to be no longer serviceable. They have led to good results; but the time has come when they must be discarded. Their work is done, and well done; but we must now look for other springs of action. Theories of human conduct are propounded, and we are invited to accept them. But before we consent to sacrifice ourselves in putting to the test these substitutes for the old truths, let us consider whether the voice of history does not bring to us the records of experiments repeated again and again, which prove the fallacy of attempting to give any other basis for wise and useful living than the fear of God. The importance of wisdom, however, is not to be limited to a consideration of its value in this life alone. We are not to deprive ourselves of the fuller light of New Testament teaching, of the greater force and urgency with which it clothes every motive to the pursuit of wisdom, by the emphasis which it lays upon rewards and punishments which are to endure forever. Solomon's judgments of life and death have new meaning added to them. "What shall it profit a man if

he gain the whole world and lose his own soul." This is an argument which we cannot escape. Man has no choice in the matter: a soul is given him to lose or keep. He is not responsible for its possession; he had no choice in his creation; he finds himself placed in certain surroundings with a certain nature; but he has the inestimable advantage of being informed both in regard to himself and his circumstances that he is immortal, that his present state is but a transient one, and that his welfare in the future depends on the use which he makes of the present. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Let us look now to the source of wisdom, whence it is to be gained. "The Lord giveth wisdom" (Prov. ii. 6). This is to be understood not only in reference to the outward rules of conduct, but to the inward disposition. "I will run the way of Thy commandments when Thou shalt enlarge my heart" is the utterance of the Psalmist. We need to recognize the direct relation which God sustains to us, the extent to which we are dependent upon divine help. It needs but a hasty glance at the pre-eminence which is given to the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart to become conscious of the utter helplessness to which man is reduced by the withdrawal of divine assistance. Constant and unremitting communion with God is the only channel through which spiritual life can be sus-

tained. The prayer of Augustine, "Lord, give what thou commandest, then command what thou wilt," is but an appreciation of the need which is felt for the power which will enable us to yield obedience to the will of God. If the sense of this need is lacking, and trust in our human nature is alone resorted to, there is danger of falling into the snare of the Pharisee in a vain attempt to establish our own righteousness.

Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; and this is true of all work which refuses to recognize or seek the presence and indwelling of the divine spirit in order to its successful accomplishment. This truth confronts us as much in the sphere of character as of any other. We miss the secret of doing the acceptable will of God in making the attempt of ourselves to maintain a life which shall be pleasing to Him. If in our own eyes we attain success, yet the failure may be none the less complete. When Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel iv. 30) looked forth upon the defences of Babylon, upon the strength and beauty of its walls and palaces, his spirit was lifted up within him, and he glorified himself as he reflected that the city laid out before him was the work of his own hands and genius; yet that very hour was the discipline sent upon him which was to abase his pride and to lead him to glorify the Most High. Out of the midst of ruin and mis-

fortune he was to learn how little the might of his power and the honor of his majesty was due to himself. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble;" and spiritual pride, which boasts itself of its own merits which cries out, My own right hand hath gotten me the victory, is as much to be condemned and as liable to overthrow as the pride which rests itself upon wealth or power. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The instant that communication with God is severed and we stand in our own strength, power for spiritual good ceases. We can neither possess nor practise wisdom except as He gives it.

Let us now transfer our thoughts for a few moments from the Old Economy to the New. We have considered what the wisest of the Hebrews at the most brilliant period of Jewish history held to be the greatest concern of man. We can read for ourselves the bold personifications and striking imagery with which he would seek to impress the truth upon his day and generation; but has there been no fuller development of the truth since then? Were Solomon to speak to us to-day, would he not preach Christ? In the place of personified wisdom would he not set before us the incarnate Son of God? And in taking home his message to our hearts, let us remember that wisdom for us is to be found in Christ. He is the

revelation of God to us; we are to look to Him to find out the ways of God. The mystery which was hidden from the foundation of the world has been revealed. It still remains that wisdom is the principal thing, walking in the fear of God and keeping His commandments; but these duties gain a fuller and richer application while we look toward Christ. He is the gift of God to us; our life should flow from Him; apart from Him we can do nothing. As wisdom afforded a sure refuge to those who embraced it and surrendered themselves wholly to its guidance, so Christ saves all who come to Him. Can we doubt, as we study His person and work, that for us He is the principal thing, — the one thing needful. The Son of God who for our sakes became poor that we through His poverty might become rich; who humbled Himself and became obedient to death — even the death of the cross — that He might redeem us from the power of satan unto God. Is there not power in this manifestation of the love of God to attract us? Are our hearts so hardened as to be steeled against the glorious gospel of the grace of God. Let, then, the object of Christ's redeeming work be considered the salvation from sin and punishment which He died to purchase, until we gain an understanding of the debt which He paid for us, and when we reflect that apart from Him that debt would remain forever unsatisfied, a lasting obligation to satisfy the

demands of divine justice, can we fail to admit that our greatest need is to avail ourselves of the discharge which is freely offered to us through the gospel. But beyond the motives which a release from sentence of death can inspire, there are positive privileges which make their appeal. Not only are we called to a salvation from death, but to a salvation unto a new life. There is a purchased possession to which we look forward. Christ has done far more than satisfy the claims against us; He has made us heirs of God; He has clothed us with a righteousness which is not our own; He has bestowed upon us the gifts of the spirit; He ensures to us through all time His care and love and fellowship.

But if such abundant blessings are procured through Him, must we not recognize that His is the chief place among our interests, and yield to Him the supremacy which He demands, and thereby bring ourselves into accord with the purpose of God, whose will it is that the name of Jesus should be exalted above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth.

II.

STEADFASTNESS.

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Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end. — HEBREWS iii. 12–14.

CHRIST'S fellowship with God, His fellowship with man, and His atoning work are the doctrines set before us in the Epistle to the Hebrews. But the doctrine presented is not given in an abstract form. The truth is not propounded for the gratification of the intellect. A living Christ is preached to living men. The subject glows under the writer's hand; but he does not forget his object to instruct and persuade men. The epistle is not a psalm of adoration to Christ, but a call to Christian believers to remain steadfast in their faith. All the light which it casts on the person and work of Christ is used to intensify the appeals to trust and dependence on Him, while the most solemn warnings and entreaties are urged against apostasy. It is with one of these warnings that the text opens.

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." This caution is not a bow drawn at a venture. The history of the chosen people furnished many events which would justify the apprehension which is suggested; and mention of one of these events has just been made. The apostle, in speaking of the need of steadfastness, supplements it with a quotation from the Old Testament, "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with this generation, and said, They do always err in their hearts; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest" (Heb. iii. 7–11). The apostle uses this reminder of the unfaithfulness of past generations and its consequence as a warning to his brethren. It exhibits to them the danger which he would have them avoid: "Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." These words are a warning against apostasy; then follows the precaution whereby to guard against it: "Exhort one another daily while it is called To-day." And then the encouragement to perseverance is given: "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end."

All the admonitions which are given to Christians partake more or less of these three elements,—conflict with sin, means of resistance, final victory.

Those to whom the apostle writes may have never thought of the possibility of their departing from the living God; yet he, knowing and seeing the tendencies which were leading in this direction, sees fit to remind them of the constant opposition to faith which was exerted by the influences operating around them. This presentation of the situation in which the Christian stands is worthy of our consideration. It does not present a novel idea, but is a truth to be kept in remembrance. The present is a time of trial and danger. "Take heed," is a lesson constantly applicable. It is written on every page of gospel history. No man is able to complain when tempted that he has not been forewarned. No man when tried by opposition or distress or persecution can plead that this was not in the plan of Christian life set before him in the beginning. And more than this, not only are we made familiar with the likelihood of special seasons of trial to call forth faith and patience, but with the constant watchfulness and diligence necessary to counteract the daily influences which tend to pervert or destroy faith. An unbiassed reading of the Word of God will set before us many dangers which are often ignored, and will reveal to us many instances of the deceitfulness of sin. Whether

these shall be for our instruction, as they were meant to be, depends on the spirit in which we approach them. If we would gain wisdom from the experience and teaching of others, we must exercise humility, and recognize the community of nature which unites men and renders the instruction given to one generation applicable to all.

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." The Scriptures do not represent confirmation in holiness as attained this side of the grave. We can never reach the point where we can look upon the lessons of Scripture as outgrown, as mastered once for all. The deceitfulness of sin may not deceive us, but then it is because its devices have been unmasked, and we have been sincere and candid enough to recognize them. The Jews in the time of Christ had many obstacles to prevent their acceptance of Him, — strong national pride, preconceived opinions of what the Messiah was to be, wrong interpretations of prophecy, — all combined to turn their heart away from their Redeemer. When we consider the infatuations that controlled them, we must give a ready sympathy with the struggle through which a Jew must pass before he could believe on Jesus as the Messiah. Conceive some ambition around which all your hopes and pride and affection centre, to the attainment of which you have bent all your strength and taxed all your resources. Then imagine if you will this idol

which had taken possession of your life suddenly shattered, and with it all the fond expectations which you had cherished; and while you stand lamenting your loss some one comes to tell you that in this very ruin you grieve for is to be found the realization of all your hopes. Picture such a scene as this, and we gather some conception of what it was for a Jew to accept Christ. And this is not wholly a product of the imagination, relying for its effect on stages of history long past. The facts may be old, but the truth which underlies the facts is still operative. When a man accepts Christ to-day he has to face the same struggle; and just in so far as he clings to false views of life and has set his heart on attaining aims and ambitions contrary to the spirit of Christ, so far will he find it difficult to accept Him. The Jews of the Old and New Testament represent human nature. Their experiences are not foreign to us; and when they are put on their guard it is time for us to be cautious. "Take heed, brethren." Those to whom this epistle was written were believers, only when the time had come that they should be teachers they had need that one teach them again the first principles of the oracles of God. They were falling backwards. Christ teaches us that some receive His Word with joy, but have no root in themselves; but when persecution ariseth because of the Word, they are offended; and He speaks of others likewise, in whom the cares

of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word that it becometh unfruitful. This was spoken for our edification. It is another word in season to unmask the deceits of sin. But, rightly viewed, the parables of our Lord, the historical examples of the consequence of sin, the failures, the backslidings, the lukewarmness we find narrated, — all these become so many danger signals of the tendencies within us and around us to weaken and destroy spiritual life; while the specific commands which are laid upon us against all kinds of sin, malice, evil-speaking, uncharitableness, covetousness, and the revelations which are made to us of the foes we have to meet, — spiritual foes, powers of darkness, the adversary who goeth about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, — these clearly disclose the dangerous susceptibilities of our nature and the enemies who stand waiting to take advantage of them. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." But to be forewarned is to be forearmed, and to gain the warning we have only to consult the Word of God. And let us remember that God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth. Neither distance of time nor separation of nationality can annul the personal bearing which the Word of God has for us. The Bible is not a Jewish book nor a curious relic of antiquity. Its teaching is universal, and shall endure until the coming of the

new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Secondly, let us turn our thoughts to the precaution which the apostle gives against apostasy. "Exhort one another daily, while it is called To day." What was to be the subject of this exhortation? This is made evident by the opening of the chapter, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our profession, Jesus Christ. This was to be the armor of resistance against every evil, — to inspirit the weak, to confirm the doubting, to succor the tempted. The commands of Christ are to be the guide of our life; His humanity is to assure us of His sympathy, and the contemplation of the sacrifice which He made is to give us confidence that the way to the throne of grace has been opened; that prayer for help in time of need will be heard. The reality of all these truths is to be kept bright and fresh in the mind by mutual exhortation. Fellowship in faith is to be sought after as much as fellowship in other matters. One Lord, one faith, one experience unites us, and it remains that we should endeavor to preserve and strengthen in each other this inward life which we possess in common. The Reciprocal duties of warning, sympathy, and encouragement are strongly marked features of Christian teaching. "Be kindly affectioned to one another with brotherly love" (Rom. xii. 10). "And let us consider one

another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. x. 24). "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. vi. 1).

It is natural when we consider the spirit of Christ's instruction and the nature of the kingdom which He came to establish that such a spirit of mutual helpfulness should be impressed on His followers; and when we consider the influence which is exerted on every man by the support and co-operation of his fellowmen, we can appreciate the force of the apostle's words, "Exhort one another." But apart from a common interest and a common duty, a common danger should prompt us to exercise fellowship one with another; and this is the motive especially enforced in the text. For self-protection, for safety, we need the safeguards which spring from united watchfulness and from the united consideration of Christian truth. We cannot value too highly the help to be gained from this source. If we should seek for an illustration of this from Scripture, the life of Paul furnishes many instances to show the support which he gained from association with Christian believers. It is shown by the care which he took on his missionary journeys to secure the companionship of men of his own spirit and belief; and it is attested by many expressions in his epistles. To the Corin-

thians he writes (1 Cor. xvi. 17, 18), "I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied. For they have refreshed my spirit." And again (2 Cor. vii. 6), "Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." And to the Romans he writes (Rom. i. 11–12), "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end you may be established: that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." Paul did not hesitate to seek for himself what he recommended to others; and certainly the earnest, anxious care which he had for the churches, as shown in the oft-repeated appeals he made to them, setting forth the hopes and aims of the Christian life, showed how firm was his belief in the influence of daily exhortation to counteract the deceitfulness of sin. And in this his example is followed by the Apostle Peter, who in his second epistle tells us (2 Pet. i. 12, 13), "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance." And the objects which he brings to their remembrance are faith. virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly love, love,

and the foundation on which these rest, the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. The truths of the gospel, the duties imposed by the gospel, should be the frequent subject of consideration among Christians, and we shall find therein a strong support of steadfastness in the faith.

This brings us to the third division of the text: the encouragement or reward which is offered to perseverance. "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." This closes naturally the train of thought with which the text began.

The picture of a danger which is constantly threatening, and of needed help which is constantly to be sought, is brightened by the mention of an end to come, and of changed conditions of life to follow. "Stedfast unto the end." There are chapters in the history of redemption. One dispensation of God's providence closes, another begins. There will come a time when all things will not continue as they were from the foundation of the world; when the human race shall have reached the end of its probation; when the period of conflict through which it is passing shall cease; when true worshippers of God shall henceforth be freed from the distractions and dangers of sin. There remaineth a rest for the people of God. This is the climax toward which their history is tending. It is represented in increasing fulness from Genesis to

Revelation. From the promise of a deliverer made in Eden to the vision of John on Patmos, when he saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.

But it is not the final consummation of the kingdom of God which is referred to in the text, but the individual entrance to that kingdom. It is the end of earthly life which comes to every man; the end which Paul had reached when he says, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me in that day, and not to me only, but to all them that love His appearing." "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." The expressions of Scripture are uniform in pointing to an end, and to the glory which shall follow. When the Christian faith has once been received and understood, faithfulness is the one grace to be enjoyed. Whatever contributes to it should be welcomed. Do we allow this side of the truth, the speedy termination of our warfare and the outlook on the eternity, which has been revealed, to have its full weight? Do we allow the example of Christ, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame?

The Apostle John says, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall

appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure. We do rightly to quicken the impulses of Christian life by the consideration of this prospect in the future; and not only so, but it is incumbent on us that we should grow in appreciation of the value of the hope which is here set before us, that the promise of fellowship with Christ should awaken a prompt and eager response. There is but one method which we can pursue to quicken our susceptibility to spiritual impression, — by increasing in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The more we study His holiness, gentleness, patience, humility, the farther we shall penetrate the depths of His character. The more we contemplate the relations which He has entered into with us as our ruler, guide, and friend, the closer we shall draw to Him. The more we understand of the great and precious promises which His Word secures for us, the more heartfelt will be our acknowledgment of the debt which we owe to Him. If then we consider as we should the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, we shall find an increased readiness to use His name as a watchword against every evil, and the remembrance of the promise, that we shall be made partakers of Christ, shall be sufficient to establish the beginning of our confidence, "stedfast unto the end."

III.

DISREGARD OF EVIDENCE.

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And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. — LUKE xvi. 31.

THE parable from which the text is taken was spoken near the end of our Lord's ministry. It was directed against the Pharisees, whose covetousness had just been referred to as the ground of their derision of Christ. The parable furnishes a picture of contrasted conditions of life, which are brought forward to illustrate the spirit and temper of those addressed. The interest centres around a certain rich man, who might well be a representative Jew. He abounded in wealth, and was possessed of religious privileges. He was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. Moses and the prophets figured among his diverse possessions. Such was his social and religious status. Five brethren were associated with him in the same manner and style of living. This is the first chapter of the history; in the second

we find a change of place and experience. Death has effected a separation between the rich man and his brethren. The family circle is broken. One of its members has gone to his last resting-place; but the gates of hell do not close upon him. They remain open, inviting us to follow and become witnesses of a personal experience beyond the grave. The rich man is in suffering; he would gladly find an alleviation from his pain. The vision of Abraham afar off excites hope; in his bosom he recognizes Lazarus, a sickly beggar, whom he had known on earth. Twice he appeals to Abraham. First he prays that Lazarus may be sent to ease his sufferings; a second time he prays that Lazarus may be sent back to earth to warn his brethren against the place of torment which has closed on him. Both requests are refused. The first would disturb the fit and necessary equilibrium between the present and the past; it is, besides, impracticable. The second request is an idle one. If Lazarus were intrusted with such a mission to earth, it would be useless. His brethren possessed Moses and the prophets; if they were not convinced by these, neither would they believe, though "one rose from the dead."

At this point the veil is drawn on the world of departed spirits. Our connection with the visible world is re-established, and we are left to apply the lessons which we have received.

Taken apart from the life of our Lord, from the events in which it was embodied, from the society to which it applied, this parable may seem obscure.

There is a rich man enjoying the good things of this life; a poor man experiencing its miseries. They die: in the next world they exchange positions. The poor man enjoys the blessings of the future life, the rich man its miseries. Until the close of the parable there is scarcely an indication why this should be. The facts are few, and the relations they sustain to each other barely indicated. How, then, are we to fill out this parable, to exhibit the natural relation of its parts and give point and pungency to its application?

In the first place, let us observe that this parable of our Lord was personal in its bearing and direct in its application. It is not a piece of fiction introduced to entertain or amuse. No, this parable of our Lord, like many others, is addressed to men, and with a very different purpose from that of engaging their interest in a story that the truth might be made palatable. It is addressed to men who, though lacking heart and conscience, had still sufficient power of reflection to recognize that these things were spoken against them. The preaching of our Lord possessed personality in a high degree. In speaking in the name of God, He could yet speak in His own name. This power was not declarative nor delegated. While man, He was

yet on a level with other men. He was their judge even on earth. He needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. It was He himself who invited to repentance; it was He who administered withering rebukes. Men had no doubt for whom His words were intended. As searching as the words of Nathan to David, "Thou art the man," were the words of Christ to His day and generation. When Christ had spoken, woe to those who heard Him and did not repent. There could be no escape from the responsibility imposed by His teaching. He spoke directly and with authority. He utterly denied the rights of His hearers to their own opinions. The claims of truth were universal, and the claims or pretensions of men to disagree with the truth, to ignore or rebut it, or in any way to escape from it, would simply wreck their lives. He told them plainly the consequences of sin. There was no escape from them. Any attempt to reason away the existence of sin and its punishment was useless. Judaistic theories of salvation were contradicted by facts. God had constituted and ruled His universe on certain principles; to act in disregard of them was to incur the penalties of Divine judgment.

This is the range of many of the parables, and it is evident in the parable before us. Life, death, and judgment, the hopelessness of the appeals of the dead already judged, the uselessness of appeals

to men then living, are the major facts of the parable. As has been said, there is a rich man in the parable; there is a poor man; yet there is little to tell us why one gained hell and the other heaven. Neither poverty nor riches determine a man's final destiny. Is this parable, then, to be resolved into a mere statement of reversals of condition in the next world? Abraham's words might suggest this: "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented." Is, then, the ratio of suffering and pleasure to be equalized? Is this a dogmatic statement that those who have enjoyment here will suffer hereafter; and the reverse, that those who suffer here will rejoice hereafter? Is misery a sure passport to heaven, and enjoyment a sure passport to hell? Evidently not. Abraham is not stating a universal truth, but speaking directly to Dives' personal position and experience. He gently reminds him that from his standpoint he had nothing to complain of. He had pursued pleasure merely as pleasure. There had been no directing spirit controlling his life. He had enjoyed himself as the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, — thoughtlessly, aimlessly. He could not appeal to any principle which insured his right to enjoy; he could not appeal to any principle as the basis of his enjoyment; he had merely lived in

pleasure while pleasure lasted. He was now in pain; and as he had found no law in life, he found no law in death. He could not prove his right to enjoy; he had no basis for maintaining he was wronged by pain. It was simply first the one and then the other. Thus far there is no reason given why the rich man should be in torment. It was a sudden and unexpected transition from his easy life on earth, and he disliked it because it was disagreeable. He had brethren who were still living on earth as he had done. He would endeavor to secure them against his wretched experience. To this end he desires Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brethren against following him.

Up to this point the parable has given us only a warning. Happiness exists hereafter. There are sudden surprises in store for many. Let those beware who entertain no thoughts on the matter, or at least no honest thoughts. It is time for them to examine the foundation on which their sense of ease and security rests. The rich do not carry their riches with them, nor the poor their poverty. The order may be reversed. It is beneficial to men everywhere to be aroused from the thought that there can be fixedness of rank or condition, unless such condition is established on principle. It is a good thing to be reminded that the Lord is no respecter of external circumstances, or birth or wealth or learning; that, whatever does regulate the dis-

tribution of His gifts, these do not. Dives and Lazarus: riches do not save, poverty does not condemn. This is the naked teaching of the parable as far as we have gone. The casual reader would understand at least this much: Let not the rich man glory in his riches; let not the poor despair because of poverty.

But now the parable takes a wider range; a flood of light is thrown backward on the previous narrative. The rich man's concern for his brethren calls forth a second reply from Abraham, which in its direct bearing upon the life of the dead, upon the present life of the living, leads us to think that the previous calm dispassionateness of the dialogue was due, on the part of the rich man, to a full understanding of the causes which had brought him thither; on the part of Abraham to a wish to avoid all mockery of a guilty man, who was conscious that he suffered rightly. Yet still in the spirit of gentleness he first draws attention, not to the uselessness of the particular request, but shows that the spirit and purpose of it had been carried out already. His brethren had Moses and the prophets; that was sufficient warning to guard them against sharing the fortunes of their deceased brother. The rich man disputes the efficiency of past Jewish history to enlighten his brethren. He had failed to avail himself of the knowledge of God, which he possessed, and his brethren were not likely to improve

on his example. "Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." Moses and the prophets were not enough. They were familiar with them, knew them by heart, had learned them as children; but if his brethren were to be saved by them, the case was hopeless. Only some fresh and startling wonder would quicken their dormant faith and arouse serious apprehension. The wish is brotherly, but the judgment is at fault. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." This is the passage which has been chosen as the text. It is the culmination of the parable. It is the witness against the supposititious rich man in the story, against the living rich man who heard it. It explains the previous narrative. Christ had followed the fortunes of a typical rich man through this world into the next. The story was as much fitted to excite ridicule then as now. There was like scepticism in the resurrection; there was like pride and indifference to judgment; like self-conceit; like self-deception. Those to whom He spoke were lovers of money, and they paid the usual adoration to a beloved object, and repaid interference with their worship with the customary contempt. Christ reveals to them the experience they might hope for beyond the grave. One of their number ardently desires a special and extraordi-

nary testimony as a means of turning his brethren to reflection, repentance, and salvation. Christ points out to them that in neglecting the testimony of Moses and the prophets they made belief in any testimony impossible. Wonders could not convert. A resurrection from the dead would convert men only, as it was in the line of previously known and recognized truth. Those who practically denied the truth would not accept miracles. If they refused to follow the moral and religious guidance of Moses, miracles could not compel them to it. The parable does not bring out, except by implications and in a general way, the faults of Christ's covetous audience.

All that we learn from it is that they neglected the laws of life which they held and professed to follow; that so long as they did this, further evidence in behalf of these laws was useless.

The only evidence which could arouse them was the execution of the laws which they had known and violated, and then it was too late.

IV.

THE UNCHANGEABLE ISSUE OF GOOD AND EVIL.

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But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. — PSALM lxxiii. 2, 3.

THESE verses present to our minds the picture of a man confused and bewildered in his attempts to sound the mysteries of the moral government of the world. Though a follower of God, he had been overtaken by trial and disappointment; his condition weighed heavily upon his spirits; help seemed afar off.

In the midst of this depression his mind had fastened itself on the prosperity of the wicked. How secure their position! How abundant their resources! Their strength is firm; they are not in trouble like other men; they are not plagued like other men; their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart can wish. Disturbing thoughts press upon him. Is there knowledge with God? Doth the Most High consider? His soul is dis-

quieted by the conflict within. His moral judgments are shaken to their foundation; he doubts the significance of life. Miserable man! But he enters the sanctuary of God; new light breaks in upon his soul; former convictions are renewed and strengthened; he understands that God is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

Such is the personal experience which we are led to consider. What may we gain from it?

It is necessary to the enjoyment of life that it should have a purpose and strength of motive in which to pursue the purpose. Let these fail, and paralysis of effort must ensue. When the object of living is taken away, we fail to live; the balance of our nature is destroyed, and we either despair or wander hither and thither, seeking rest and finding none.

Many temptations assail us in the Christian life; but none so strong, so chilling, so deadly as that which bids us forsake God, because seemingly forsaken of Him. When tried by other temptations God is our refuge and strength, — our strong tower in whom we shall never be moved. But when our refuge fails us, whither can we go? Was it not thus that the soul of the Psalmist was shaken? What else could have wrung from him the cry, "Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." Few will ask whether life is worth living, until it has already

begun to pall upon their senses, and few will ask whether life is worth living worthily until faith in God begins to fail. We see then the power of the temptation that presented itself in the prosperity of the wicked. How was it met? By seeking communion with God, — by entering His sanctuary. Fellow Christians, this temptation presses upon us to-day. How are we to meet it? Are we to take comfort in the thought that after all the prosperity of the wicked is of short continuance? That thought brought comfort to the Psalmist, and it might to us, could we but reach that plane of spiritual exaltation in which we regard the wicked solely in the light of enemies of God. But let us not suppose that when Scripture saith, "Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord," that it teaches us to be patient, only that we may view with more intense satisfaction the greater punishment prepared of the Lord. "As I live, saith the Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Should it then become a cause of rejoicing to us? Would not a true sense of our own sin keep us from the hasty desire to be the witness of another's condemnation? Is it not rather a failure to appreciate the true meaning of the Christian's life that awakens such a hostile interest in another's future? The life that we should live in the flesh, the life that is hid with Christ in God, concerns us as individuals. It is a personal question whether we shall serve God or not, and the fate of the

wicked can only have an interest for us as we ask ourselves the question, — not whether the wicked can sin and live, but whether we can sin and live. Further than this, the question, What shall be the end of this man? deserves the same answer as Peter's question, What shall this man do? What is that to thee?

But though we may show the unreasonableness of the sin, let us not belittle the temptation. The two stand on different footings. The prosperity of the wicked becomes a stumbling-block in proportion as the prosperity of the righteous in this world is despaired of; and it is not natural nor easy to be resigned when the objects of this life have to be set aside, and when the way in which we are suffered to serve God no longer brings enjoyment. To glorify God in all things furnishes a lofty purpose for life; but it is far easier to fulfil it when our work, though undertaken from higher motives, is yet sweet for its own sake. Yes, to live for God, when filled with life and energy, requires a consecrated spirit; but it requires renewed consecration to live for Him in a time of waiting, of suffering, of reproach.

It is no light matter when in a storm of trial the cables that bind us to our moorings, which give fixedness to our life, begin to work, and we are forced out upon the sea of God's judgment. Then, if we have not learned to transfer our hopes of happiness

from this world to the next and to trust in God alone, the prosperity of the wicked becomes a snare to us. It is easy to deceive ourselves in this matter, to mistake self-sufficiency or self-complacency for trust in God; but in the day that He maketh His power known, when He layeth His finger upon the springs of our self-confidence, and the streams thereof are dried up, we are undeceived. The soul that seemed strong becomes weak; instead of submitting, it rebels; instead of faith, doubts. Overcome by its fears and disappointments, it looks many ways before it looks up. It may steady itself by looking to lower sources of comfort than the highest. It may find shelter from its distractions in stoicism; it may find it in expediency; it may find it in meditating on the death of the wicked; but never will it find the joy and peace of believing, until, forsaking these props which God has given us in our weakness, it looks to God alone. Christ hath broken down the middle wall of partition; He hath made both one; by Him we have access to the Father; through Him we know the depth of the Father's love and the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.

Let our hearts be filled with this truth, and prosperity of the wicked would trouble us no longer; we would cease our efforts to discover the relations of others to God before we are willing to recognize our own; but filled with the consciousness of His

presence, and strengthened by His might, our spirit would find utterance in the exultant strain of the Psalmist: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee; and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."

V.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD THE BELIEVER'S SECURITY.

V.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD THE BELIEVER'S SECURITY.

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. — JOSHUA i. 9.

THESE words to Joshua are the justification and support of every man whose life receives its direction from faith in God.

They were uttered at the beginning of a new epoch in the fortunes of the chosen people. They had reference to the experiences of a new and untried mode of life. Wandering was to give place to activity; the life of the desert to the life of arms. The exigencies of travel through barren and inhospitable regions were to give place to the exigencies of battle. Unknown, unfamiliar paths were to be entered upon. The future might well seem full of uncertainty and peril. The tribes of Israel were but men. They were susceptible to the fluctuations of feeling. They had witnessed acts of divine power; they had visible tokens of the divine presence, but

these had left their personal freedom and individuality unchanged. Theocracy had left all the essentials of manhood intact. They were not mechanical instruments propelled by irresistible divine impulses. Like us, they walked by faith, not by sight. No less faith because they had been directed by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Fire and cloud could not satisfy hunger nor assuage thirst. They were signs of God's presence; but they were not sufficient to satisfy distrust and unbelief. Faith in the providence of God was as necessary then as now to promote hopefulness and prevent despondency. Hitherto the history of Israel had been conspicuously a divine history, — a series of undertakings whose origin and continuance had been found in faith in a divine command which prompted and inspired them. This history possessed meaning and purpose only as it was related to God. The instant that this relation was broken it became obscure, meaningless, unintelligible. A successful issue depended wholly upon its development in the line of the original intent in which it was conceived. The moment that the Israelite fell into unbelief, he was like a man walking in his sleep, who wakes and wonders at his situation and what has brought him there. His life had been modelled upon a divine plan. To drop this plan or to forget its author was to make his situation unbearable and ridiculous. His only hope was the continuance and assurance

of divine assistance; and this assurance is not lacking. "Have not I commanded thee? . . . The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

These words possess grandeur and sublimity because they link the feebleness of human efforts with the divine efficiency; because they secure to finite beings the fixed purpose and certainty of accomplishment which belongs to infinite power and wisdom. It is the help of God securing the safety and success of those laboring under His direction. The courage and faith and hope which is aroused by the presence of earthly champions might well be aroused by the presence of the Lord of Hosts. All that the presence of Napoleon was to the French; of Charles XII. to the Swedes; of Frederic the Great to the Prussians, — so much, and more, was the presence of God among the tribes of Israel. His leadership was the inspiration which infused courage into every heart, which nerved every arm, which transformed each situation of peril and labor into an opportunity for eager and hopeful service. Trust in God at once became an all-persuasive, modifying power in every man's life. All things were viewed in relation to God, and by virtue of this relation acquired dignity and sacredness, gained in singleness and sincerity of purpose, and increased in power of achievement. It is this aspect of the truth which we would consider this morning, and consider it as men who, already believing in the omnipresence

and omnipotence of God, desire to gain a nearer personal manifestation of it, and above all to gain the constancy, courage, and hope, which ever springs from the presence and power of God working in and for His people. Joshua was of all men the most faithful in the Jewish host; and yet to him was the charge given to rely upon God when tempted to fear and dismay. The same charge, the same promise, is needful for us to-day. The living, watchful, personal care of God is the only guarantee which is given us that loyalty to His commandments will insure success and not end in confused disaster. It is then a guarantee, of which we do well to remind ourselves; for upon it hangs the consistent regulation of life. We are not to regard this as a newly-discovered truth. Joshua had been swayed by it all his life. It was an old truth; but one which in its application was to be ever new, — an old truth to be applied to new circumstances. So far as Joshua was concerned, nothing could be better known, or partake less of the nature of a discovery than this word of God. We make the mistake at times of trying to force freshness of discovery upon facts and principles which have long been known to us, and which have long possessed an active influence in our life. It is not possible for us to look at Christianity as something foreign to us. So much of it is involved in our laws, customs, habits of thought, that it is no longer possible for us to view

it as a new system. We have not the foreign point of view necessary. Yet the effort is often made to gain a like impression from Christian facts, as though they had previously been unknown. Men strain after the pleasure of new discoveries when they are traversing ground in which they have long been domiciled.

"Have not I commanded thee?" This injunction has reference to the future; but its force comes from the past, from facts patent in history. It is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of Joseph and Moses, who speaks, — the God whom Joshua had served and worshipped. Joshua had no need to ask, Who is the Lord, that I should serve Him? "Have not I commanded thee?" I, the God of Moses, who wrought wonders in Egypt and in the Red Sea; who fed His people with manna in the desert, — I have commanded thee. It was an old story, not a new one; as I have been with Moses so will I be with thee. It was impossible for Joshua to doubt the existence of God with the marked providences of his nation's history before him. He had no doubts about the personality of God and His direct agency in controlling the affairs of earth. What he needed, and what he received, was the assurance that this commanding "I" should sustain his long-continued interest in him. Have not I, whom thou hast long known, commanded thee? It is impossible for us without thought and reflection to fulfil

the divine purpose concerning us. The natural desire is to act without thought; to choose instinctively the best, the truest course. Quick perception, strong decision, resolute endeavor, — we would have all these without effort.

"Have not I commanded thee?" And yet how many thoughts might cluster around that "I;" how many memories might it recall to Joshua of dangers escaped, of thirst relieved, of hunger satisfied; how many marks of divine favor and divine displeasure. Joshua then would find his inspiration in his recollections. It is his faith, trust, obedience, which kept him within the presence of God. Joshua and God had a near understanding of each other. So it is with many who have followed in Joshua's course. The "I" of their past history is sufficient to imbue them with patience and endurance for the future. Yet it is here that we need a reminder. We may yet have to learn the lesson of reading God into our past history. Answers to prayer have been many. Deliverance from evil, forgiveness of sins, provision for daily needs, — all these have been experienced; and yet we do not distinctly recognize in them the presence of God. We have a sufficient stock of available memories; but we do not draw on them. The "I" of God has not been mastered as it should. Our knowledge of it has not increased. "Have not I commanded thee" has not been a growing power in life. The providence of God has been accepted

as a matter of course; but providence is generally considered of God around us, and has lost the power of personal incitement. The connection between the leadership of God and the security of the Christian is obscured. The certainty which the facts of observation and of history might establish are lost sight of in the attempts to force a feeling of faith, when the grounds on which that faith rests are scarcely held worthy of consideration.

The same promise is necessary and needful to-day; but its strength lies in past fulfilments. The power and presence of God are the only guarantee that loyalty to His commandments will insure success and not end in confusion and disaster. It is then a guarantee which we do well to keep in mind. On it hangs the consistent regulation of life. It matters little what the phase of experience is which leads us to value this guarantee, — whether it is Canaanitish hordes which are obscuring the faithfulness of God, or the obstacles, difficulties, and dangers of present experience. It was God's presence in the life which was to sustain Joshua. It did not have reference to the next world. It was in a material conquest that God's assistance was promised. Joshua possessed no infallible certitude of success beyond what is promised to all. The extension, instead of the limitation of the sphere of God's activity and influence, should be the natural result of faith in God; and the nearer we approach

to Him, the farther we understand Him, the more readily do we acknowledge the constancy of His relation to us. What is the object of the teaching of apostles and prophets if it is not to bring in relation to God every sphere of human activity, and to make the divine presence felt throughout all the relations of life, — even those in whose workings and results we are apt to recognize no higher efficiency than ourselves.

"Have not I commanded thee?" Joshua might have readily supposed that on the numbers of his hosts and on their own right arms depended the victory. But he is taught that his whole line of life had been the result of God's commands, and that in all doubtful issues it was God's presence which insured the victory. "Be not afraid; neither be thou dismayed." As his position would become ridiculous if at this point in his career he should forget the past history of himself and nation, so his position would become one of danger if God forgot him. It is against the possibility of this latter result that he is warned: "The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

In what further respects may we apply this crisis in Joshua's history to ourselves? It is all so familiar. There is nothing new or strange in it. Life directed by God, sustained by his presence, rewarded according to his promise. First, we may observe that in the present instance the character toward

whom our attention is directed was a man of surpassing activity. A ruler invested with sole responsibility for supplying the minds of an entire people. His life would certainly be a full and busy one. It could not be otherwise. It was the direction then of activity, not its suppression; its encouragement, and not its discouragement, which we observe. It is the picture of a busy man urged to his work as the Lord's work, not taken from his work to serve the Lord; a man always enabled to identify his life with the service of God; always able to find his assurance in the presence of God. This is not an exceptional personal history nor an exceptional mark of the divine favor. It is intended to be the history of every Christian, is his history so far as he is a Christian.

"Have not I commanded thee?" These are almost the exact words of Christ to His disciples, bidding them enjoin upon the world all these things that He had commanded them, and promising His presence in their midst. "And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." The New Testament is the consummation of the Old. The glory of the latter is greater than that of the former. The attestations of Christ support and intensify the divine promise made to Joshua.

It is a promise not to be exhausted in a moment, or momentarily accepted and understood; but one of which our appreciation will increase as we learn more and more of the ways of God and man.

VI.

THE TRIUMPH OF PERSONAL FAITH IN THE MIDST OF NATIONAL JUDGMENTS.

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Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem, because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste. And I will make judgment the line and righteousness the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. — Isaiah xxviii. 14–18.

The verses forming the text were uttered during the reign of Hezekiah, King of Judah. They contain an accusation, a judgment, and a promise. In their bearing they are applicable rather to the rulers and to the people at large than to their king.

Hezekiah himself was a reformer, and his reign bore a bright contrast to the idolatrous reign of

Ahaz, who preceded him, and the dark ungodly reign of Manasseh, who followed him; consequently we may assume that this prophecy was uttered against the ungodly spirit and temper of the time, especially as manifested in those high in authority in Jerusalem. Let us proceed, then, to consider more definitely the occasion of the prophecy, the judgment which it predicts, and the gleam of hope which brightens it.

Judgment and promise, condemnation and blessing, are the two lines which run side by side through the word of God. They penetrate every message, they furnish the clew to every heavenly dispensation. Sometimes when they precede the event they are bound together and intended as instruction, warning, and comfort to a collective people; at other times, to a backsliding generation they indicate that there is still room for repentance; and then again we find them following the event, but each pursuing its independent course, each alike to be fulfilled. There will be judgment,—a judgment which shall destroy. There will be blessing, but it will be enjoyed only by those whom the judgment leaves untouched.

Which of these three courses is indicated in the text? Is it the announcement of a probation yet to be, on which is conditioned two results, one good, the other evil? Does it declare a punishment which may yet be averted. Or thirdly, does it speak of irrevocable judgment?

It is only necessary to give our attention to the words of the prophecy to reach a conclusion. What is the accusation? It is not a single offence which is charged upon Judah, neither yielding to sin under stress of temptation, but a thoughtful, deliberate, permanent abandonment of every principle of life and truth, and a wilful self-determined compact with every form of evil. The charge is the stronger for lacking specification. It is vain to enumerate varieties of sin when the whole nature is corrupt. It is vain to criticise parts of religious worship when the whole system is honeycombed with falsehood. When the fountain is known to be corrupted, there is no need to analyze the streams which flow from it. When mortal sickness has seized upon its victim, it is unnecessary to emphasize the various symptoms of approaching death. We tell him that life has practically left him, that the hopes which he may have founded on deceptive sensations are false, and that the symptoms which he may still experience are but accompaniments of the end which is at hand. It is such a message which Isaiah bears to sin-stricken Judah. He sees not the symptoms of disease, but of death. His eye quickened and purified by divine truth sees but one issue to the moral corruption around him. As with our natural foresight we can prophesy the fatal havoc of the plague when all the conditions which tend to develop it are pres-

ent, so could Isaiah with his divinely illumined vision predict the judgment which awaited an apostate nation.

But the words of the text suggest more than the mere fact of present wickedness and approaching destruction. They reveal to us the profound innermost causes of the terrible imminent fatality. Judah had not only separated from God, but had defied Him. They had seen afar off the oncoming of the overflowing scourge, and they marked its progress with cool disdain. They had made a covenant with death, an agreement with hell. Lies should be their refuge, and falsehood their hiding-place. Against this vain presumption the prophet speaks. As the builder tests the correctness of his work by the line and plummet, so shall their work be tested by the line and plummet of judgment and righteousness. The pelting hail shall sweep away their refuge, and the waters shall overflow their hiding-place. Far from escaping the overflowing scourge, they shall be trodden down by it.

This is the burden of the message which Isaiah had for the people of God twenty-five centuries ago. Is the instruction which it contains out of date because of its antiquity? Shall we admire the Hebrew prophet for the force of his diction and the power of his figures, and pass over the lesson which he teaches? Shall we concede to him the merits of style and deny to him the power of truth; or does

truth change from generation to generation? Does it vary with race and climate? Is there one truth for the Hebrew and another for the Gentile? Was the Gospel preached to the Jews only, or also to the Greeks? "All Scripture," says the apostle, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. iii. 16). "In old time holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. i. 21). None who reflect that the prophets were in the line of truth which began with the promise made in Eden and culminated in Christ, will deny that their teaching retains its power. "All these things happened unto them for examples, and were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor. x. 11). Let us consider the text in this light, as an illustration of God's dealing with men, and as necessarily having an application to us because we are men.

What, then, had Judah done to provoke such a denunciation? The general charge of lies and falsehood must have its basis. It is only necessary to read the historical and prophetical testimony of the time to discover what basis. The whole range of life at Jerusalem was corrupted. They eat, drank, and slept in an atmosphere permeated with falsehood. There was not a relation of life which escaped the pestilential influence. The

entire social tissue was vitiated. Oppression, political scheming, idolatry, were rife. The poor were ground into the dust. For political integrity they trusted to political combinations. Heathen gods absorbed their worship. These aspects of individual and national life all point the same lesson. They were all parts of the fabric of falsehood to which every sphere of life furnished its portion. They had given the lie to all their past history. They had forgotten Moses, David, and Solomon, and the God in whom they had trusted. The commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," influenced them no longer. David's confidence in God and its proved justification, Solomon's prayer and its abundant answer, were lost upon them.

Nevertheless this was a time of reformation, — a real reformation, — though one which lost itself in formalism and diplomacy. The people were animated with the desire to fulfil religious requirements, but they lacked the heart to do it in a religious spirit. They sacrificed to God, but put their trust in Egypt. Rebuke, warning, threatening, promise, alike failed to open their eyes to their misdeeds and to the judgment which attended upon them. In vain the prophet cried, "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; . . . but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel." In vain the Divine displeasure was declared against sacrifice and fasts which belied

the truth they were intended to inculcate, and were performed without meaning and without effect.

Yet we are not to forget that the king in whose reign Isaiah spake was truly a man of God. His life furnishes three prominent instances of personal prayer to God, — one at the enthusiastic national observance of the passover which marked the beginning of his reign, that the feast might be accepted in the spirit, and the irregularities in the letter forgiven; one that the nation might be delivered from the Assyrian army which threatened them; one that his own life endangered by sickness might be spared. All were heard: the Lord accepted the passover; the Assyrian army was humbled; his own life was prolonged. These were conspicuous proofs that Hezekiah realized wherein the source of all real strength lay. They were, likewise, proofs that the Lord had not deserted His people, that His ear was open to their cry, that He was ready and willing to hear the prayers of all who would put their trust in Him; and we find it plainly recorded that Hezekiah trusted God, for (2 Chron. xxxi. 21) in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered. But we also find later that the mercy of God was accepted by Hezekiah without due acknowledgment or thankfulness (2 Chron. xxxii. 25), that he rendered not

again according to the benefit due unto him, for his heart was lifted up; and even to the king whose reign was a reminder of the glories of Solomon, it was foretold that his descendants and their possessions should go in captivity to Babylon.

There had been a wide-spreading, sincere, zealous reformation, but the pride of prosperity sapped its strength; adversity had prompted a speedy return to God, but the adversity passed and God was forgotten. Men began to loosen their hold on the sure foundation, and in the succeeding reign of Manasseh Judah and Jerusalem did worse than the heathen whom the Lord had destroyed before them; and the Lord spake to Manasseh and his people, but they would not hearken. Indeed, a broader view of the faith and practice of the generations preceding Hezekiah and subsequent to him enables us to understand more fully the applicability of the words of the text: "And I will make judgment the line and righteousness the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place."

Isaiah had prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz; and whilst he uttered only the words of the Lord, he knew full well the character of the people to whom he uttered them. But whilst he knew his countrymen, he also knew the Lord. He could predict with confidence that

lies and falsehood should be swept away together with those who trusted to them. He could also predict that in contrast to this treacherous refuge the "Lord had laid in Zion a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste." The word of God standeth sure. In the midst of panic, when all confidence fails, when men are asking what shall the end be, when the social fabric is trembling on the brink of dissolution, still might the faithful Israelite say, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble" (Ps. xlvi. 2). God was present with His people, His purposes in salvation would not fail. He had laid a foundation which would inevitably secure the safety of all who rested upon it.

This was the truth delivered to the time of Isaiah; it is the same truth which is delivered to us to-day. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil," was the admonition which our Lord gave to His disciples. The principles of truth which they declared, He reiterated. He was the prophet who confirmed the testimony of all the prophets who had preceded Him and who foreshadowed Him. The seal of the kingdom of heaven was affixed to the utterances of His servants who had been sent to prepare the way before Him. The will of God is unchanging. The kingdom of God

is a unit. The Jewish church and the Christian church are one. Jews were not saved because Jewish, nor because of circumcision; they were saved because children of God. The church of God is not founded on blood, but in spirit and in truth. It is dominated not by national boundaries, but by the possession of one Lord, one faith, one baptism; and because of this unity its teaching is limited neither to race nor time, but instructs the church of every nation in every age. It has the same message to raise against greed, oppression, political corruption, idolatry, whether gross or refined, which it raised by the mouth of Isaiah. It has the same protest to enter against formalism, against lip worship, against reformation whose only point is the resuscitation of elaborate rituals. "They are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them," is the word of the Lord; and in contrast to such false worship He commands, "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow" (Is. i. 16, 17).

Will this commandment fall on unheeding ears as it did then? Does this generation say unto the prophets, Speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits? Have we not reason to fear that there is the same callousness of heart now as existed then? Is there not the same blindness to the truth, the

same unwillingness to hear it, the same determination to ignore it, and with all the same false pretentious worship which desires prophets, but desires also to dictate their words, which desires to worship, but will carry it no further than agreeable forms? We may be ignorant how deep or wide a hold this spirit exerts among ourselves; but we may rest assured that wherever there is hollowness of religious principle, whether manifested in society, politics, or worship, it comes within the scope of the denunciation which the prophet pronounces upon lies and falsehood.

But, Christian friends, let us remember that if we hold the truth the judgment on falsehood will pass us by. Too frequently we are tempted to believe that the fortune of the Christian is wrapped up with the society or nation to which he belongs. When buoyed up by social or economical forces it is natural to take alarm when these forces show signs of changing their direction; when the foundations in which we had previously trusted seem appointed to destruction, it is long before we turn to the one foundation which can never fail. Yet the Rock of Ages is as firm to-day as in the days of Isaiah. The God of Isaiah is our God. The fuller revelation of God in Christ only sheds a stronger light on the corner-stone of all ages. The prophets and He who fulfilled the prophets are inseparably united. The former declared the word

of God, the latter was the word of God. We cannot reject the prophecy and accept Him who fulfilled it; we cannot accept Christ and reject the prophets who prefigured Him. The Lord, our God, is one Lord. His truth is one, His word is one. We must either trust in Him or trust in falsehood. It is for us to choose which is the safer resting-place. The facts lie before us. The responsibility of choice rests upon us. No man can serve two masters. The God of all truth and the father of lies stand before you. Choose ye this day whom ye will serve. There is not room for two opinions, there is not room for doubt. But remember that to whom ye yield yourselves servants, his servants ye are, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness. Can there be any hesitation as to whose service you will enter? May we not all follow the example of the leader of Israel who in presenting the same choice to a nation gave his own decision first, that whatever the popular voice might be, as for him and his house they would serve the Lord?

VII.

THE LIFE TO COME.

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If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. — MATT. xvi. 24, 25; MARK viii. 34, 35.

THE text follows closely upon the refusal of Peter to admit the truth of Christ's prediction regarding His suffering and death. It is the rebuke with which Christ meets Peter's unwillingness to receive or comprehend the truth.

The words are addressed to the multitude as well as to the disciples. They imply not only that Christ's life should follow the course which had been outlined, but that the disciples should be called upon to face a similar experience. They form part of that process of disillusion by which Christ was opening the eyes of those who heard Him to the sterner realities of the gospel. In the midst of the brighter work of His ministry, — relieving suffering, feeding the hungry, healing the afflicted, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, — we find

Him constantly correcting the false impressions which the blessings of His earthly ministry produced on the popular mind. The external signs of the gospel of the kingdom, the universal beneficence which attends its first proclamation, were welcomed and appreciated; but they were thought to constitute the full measure of Christ's work. The heavenly and spiritual elements of His teaching were ignored in the midst of the earthly and physical benefits which His presence brought with it. The typical character of His works of mercy and the witness they bore to the exalted character of His personality were overlooked, lost sight of. Our Lord frequently opposes this tendency among His hearers. He emphasizes the analogy between the earthly and the spiritual, by which the former was to interpret the latter. When He was followed by the multitude whose hunger had been miraculously satisfied, He discloses the false basis on which their eager impetuosity rested. "Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled. Work not for the meat that perisheth, but for the meat which abideth unto eternal life" (John vi. 26, 27). The healing of the body pointed to the healing of the soul. "And behold, they brought to Him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven" (Matt. ix. 2).

If the deeper meaning of the works of Christ were lost upon the multitude, how much more would the drift of His teaching be misunderstood as He strove to make evident the separation between the earthly and the spiritual, and to disassociate the one from the other. Peter's refusal to accept Christ's prophecy of the suffering which awaited Him, followed closely upon the same apostle's recognition of Him as the Messiah.

The confidence and hope which this confession inspired was far removed from any thought of a Messiah, mocked, scourged, crucified. The apostle's quick rejoinder, "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee" (Matt. xvi. 22), showed that his previous confession did not include such dark anticipations. They understood the spiritual in a measure. Their faith in Jesus as the Messiah was not outward but inward. "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xvi. 17). Nevertheless, they were slow to recognize the idea of a Messiahship unaccompanied by material success. "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee." Then Christ turns on Peter with the startling rebuke, that as his former confession was prompted by the spirit of God, his present declaration came from the Father of lies; then resuming His former discourse He further unfolds the truth, that not only should the earthly career of the Messiah contradict popular expectation,

but that the time had now come for the disciples to disabuse their minds of any material advantage which they might have anticipated from association with Him. The path of the disciples was to follow that of their Master. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. xvi. 24). This left no room for confounding discipleship with Christ, with worldly success. Since the life of Christ was to terminate on the cross, the severance was complete between the thought of an earthly and heavenly Messiah, between an earthly and heavenly reign. Christ's crucifixion was the death-blow to temporal hopes, because within the temporal sphere entire failure had resulted. So far as the cross was concerned, it was the grave of personal hopes and aspirations.

One thing was now certain, — Christ's kingdom belonged to a spiritual sphere, or else it was nonexistent. His teaching must receive a spiritual interpretation or become meaningless. The ground of misunderstanding had been removed. But beyond transforming the conceptions which had been entertained of Himself, Christ had yet to transform the conceptions which the disciples held of their own future. They were to follow Him. Beyond that there was nothing left to be revealed. If the cross awaited the disciple as well as the Master, the disciple must look for a spiritual basis to his own life.

The only hope left to him was a spiritual one; it was that or nothing. That the way to life should lie through the gates of death was a stumbling-block to the Jews and folly to the Greeks; but to those who looked beyond the grave to the spiritual life which would rise on the ruins of the earthly, it was the power of God unto salvation. This is the meaning of the paradox. "For whosoever would save his life, shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it."

It is the summit of the line of Christian faith and thought which it touches. No further or higher conception is possible; but while it is the summit, it is at the same time the basis of Christian life. It is the ultimate distinction between Godliness and Worldliness. It cuts directly across the path of every philosophy which exalts the seen above the unseen, the temporal above the spiritual. No reconciliation is possible between the two. It draws a complete line of separation between the believer and the world. The Christian must stake his life, his hope, his all on a resurrection. His philosophy of this life must be controlled and dominated by the life to come. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ," says the apostle, "we are of all men most pitiable." The Christian could not justify his life to himself, nor to the world, except on the basis of his faith in the unseen and supernatural.

Having observed then the distinction which is

drawn logically and of necessity between the disciple and the unbeliever, let us now turn our attention to the attitude of the Christian toward the text, and endeavor to gain a hopeful and inspiring comprehension of it.

"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it."

In some conditions of society, in some periods of the world's history, these words have received a plain and literal interpretation; but when they were first uttered they attracted as little attention and were as dimly comprehended as they would be now if thrust into the forefront of Christian preaching, and for the same reason that present outward conditions would not serve to illustrate the truth stated. But this does not alter the plain meaning of the words, that faith includes the conception of a sacrifice which shall be ultimate and final so far as this world is concerned.

When our Lord uttered a similar truth later in His ministry, Peter answered, "We have left all and followed Thee; what then shall we have" (Matt. xix. 27)? But what was the path in which they had been led up to that time. They had followed Christ in the active work of His ministry as He journeyed through Judea and Galilee; but they did not know the abrupt turnings in the path by which He led

them, and what following Him should mean for them in later years. But though they did not understand the intimations of sacrifice and suffering which He gave them, they eagerly yielded to any demand which He seemed to lay upon them. When the mother of James and John presented her petition that her sons might sit, the one upon the right hand of Jesus, and the other upon the left, He said to them, "Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They answered, "We are able" (Matt. xx. 22). At the last supper all professed their readiness to die with Him (Matt. xxvi. 35). The disciples had faith in Christ, even when He spoke above their capacity; but it required the progress of events to quicken their comprehension and bring their faith in line with His teaching.

"If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross, and follow me." The disciples were not to reach this standard through any enforced abnegation on their part. It was not to be attained by any effort of the imagination, nor by an act of will. It was the simple declaration that the disciple was not above his Master, that in the gradual development of the circumstances of life the disciples would find that the hostility of the world would shape a path for them as it had for the Lord. But this time was not to be anticipated. It was a dark, withering experience when it came, — unexpected, unnatural, inexplicable. The life lost would for the

moment make a deeper impression than the life won. But the life lost was not the end of the path. The cross had been predicted, but likewise the resurrection. The Son of man should be raised up. If the crucifixion gave serious meaning to the sacrifice required, "if any man will come after me, let him take up his cross, and follow me," the resurrection represented with equal force the fulfilment of the promise, "And whosoever shall lose his life shall save it." If their faith sunk under the discipline of the cross, it rose again in confidence and joy at the resurrection. The teaching concerning the life lost and the life won had been taken out of the sphere of the figurative and the typical and the symbolical. For them it was henceforth a living reality which they had seen and witnessed. But the events which revealed the meaning of Christ to the apostles are part of our faith. The same facts which illustrated the text for them illustrate it for us.

What then is the lesson which we may gain from it in the light shed upon it by the cross and by the resurrection ?

There is but one lesson, and that taught so clearly that none can overlook its presence nor escape its force, — the essential difference between the surroundings under which the life of faith is nurtured here and in the life to come ; the essential difference between the reception which awaits faith here and hereafter. Life, eternal life is not to be thought of

merely in the light of continued existence. Eternal life according to Christ and His apostles begins here, in the midst of earthly scenes and conditions. It reaches its consummation in the world to come, because transplanted to a higher and more glorious sphere. It is precisely this life and the changed conditions which attend it of which the text speaks. The development of the natural forces of this world in their opposition to truth and holiness compressed and straitened the path of Christ until it was narrowed to the space between files of Roman soldiery and terminated on Calvary.

The natural forces of the heavenly and spiritual work in their support of truth and righteousness exalt Him who suffered here to the throne of the universe. The eternal life which the world rewarded with the cross is one with the eternal life which heaven rewarded with its crown. The life was the same whether in earth or heaven. The eternal life which the believer possesses is the same with the life of his Lord from whom he received it. The same experiences await its development on earth, the same change of experience in passing from earth to heaven.

Let us not under-estimate the temptation which comes from the separation or contradiction or hostility often arising between the temporal and the spiritual. That these two spheres are not correlated on earth and do not mutually support each other is

often as great a tax on faith now as it was in the time of the apostles.

It is as much a shock to faith now, when earthly supports and the objects on which earthly interest centres are removed, as it was in the time of the apostles when Christ died. Faith is more readily maintained when it has visible support, and when the presence and power of God is manifest to the outward eye; but when the separation between these begins to take place, and the presence of God has withdrawn itself from the sphere of earthly aid, and opposition rather than divine assistance is reflected in daily experience, doubt and fear is often the result. We follow the apostles to the tomb; we overlook the triumphant issue which their faith received in the resurrection.

But the temptation is no greater now than it was then. The same means which conquered it then will conquer it now. "Consider Him," said the apostle, "that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin." As we contemplate the experience of our Lord, the temptation will lose its strange, unnatural character, and will seem but the natural accompaniment of the experience of the disciple who recognized Christ as Lord. But not only does the humiliation of Christ add endurance to our faith, but in His exaltation we find a permanent and inexhaustible

source of inspiration. The outlook for the future, which cheered our Lord during His earthly ministry, may well be drawn upon to sustain us. The joy set before Him, which enabled Him to endure the cross, despising the shame, is part of our hope. Unbelievers may find in many philosophies sufficient reason for maintaining the consistency and stability of their lives ; but for the Christian who rests upon the facts and truths of His faith, and allows them their full logical force in the moulding and shaping of his life, if he would not be false to himself and to the faith of which he is a witness before the world, he must acknowledge that the bent and purpose of his life proceeds from that hope, peculiar to the Christian, and assured to us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, of "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. i. 4, 5).

Part Second.

I.

OPPOSITION TO TRUTH.

I.

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But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth. — JOHN viii. 40.

WHEN these words were spoken, the larger portion of our Lord's ministry had been accomplished. By teaching and miracle the character of His work was fully established. He could now appeal to His past life as a consistent logical whole, seen and read of all men; possessing a meaning which could not be misunderstood; which it was equally difficult to evade or distort. Three years He had spoken among them the words which none other man spake; three years He had done among them the works which none other man did. He had taught in the synagogues and the temple; in secret He had said nothing. His public career exhibited force, character, definiteness. His individual characteristics were marked; He was unlike other men, yet always like Himself. His word and conduct possessed a unity and coherence which compelled attention and necessitated acceptance or rejection.

He was no longer merely a Jewish carpenter, a diligent workman, gaining the favor and respect of His townsmen. He stood now apart from His old associates. Broken friendships, broken attachments, had been His lot in the past, were still to be His lot in the future. Hostility was fast shaping itself against Him. Each miracle, each discourse, intensified antagonism. As the light grew brighter, its character more apparent, the efforts to quench it grew stronger. All may not have been aware of it; all may not have known their own hearts. Only a short time before, the question "Why go ye about to kill me?" had seemed unintelligible to some. Either in their ignorance of Christ or in their ignorance of the current of feeling which prevailed among the authorities of Jerusalem, they felt that these words covered a suggestion too startling to be rational. "Thou hast a devil who goeth about to kill thee," was the quick response. Now Christ no longer states the truth under the guise of a question, but makes a plain statement of the fact; and then in direct unequivocal language lays bare the principles which were hidden behind this fact, which necessitated it, which gave meaning to it, which made it an event of terrible interest to those concerned in it. "Ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth which I have heard of God." Christ had thoroughly identified His words and works as proceeding from God. Many had felt instinctively

the logic of the events which had attended His career. A natural and ready response attested the conviction of the heart, "When Christ cometh will He do more miracles than these which this man hath done." "Never man spake like this man." The evidence seemed undeniable that Christ was in accord with the purposes of God and fulfilling His will. He could now declare plainly what many had already believed, that He had spoken what He had heard of God. His person and work could no longer be separated.

They could not antagonize Him, and accept the truth He uttered. If they hated Him, they hated Him for what He was; for what He had done; for what He represented. In seeking to kill Him, they sought to extinguish the doctrine which He had taught, "Ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth." They were furnishing an exhibition of the undying enmity which exists between truth and falsehood, between rights and pretensions, between the will of God and the falsifiers of that will. The time had come for the direct statement of the issue involved between Christ and His countrymen. Christ had previously shown the hollowness of the charges against Him; He now discloses the spirit of those who had preferred them. It was not the form which hostility took, but the attitude of mind in which it was rooted, that Christ wished to bring before them. He denies their claim of fatherhood in Abraham or God. Their parental resemblance be-

trays their fatherhood. They are of their father, the devil. He was a murderer from the beginning. They are fast following in his footsteps. He abode not in the truth because there was no truth in him. They, too, were lost to the recognition of truth. Lies would have been in harmony with their nature and convictions. To false Messiahs they would have given a hearty and sympathetic response; but the true Messiah was outside the range of their susceptibilities. The brief comment, "He hath a devil," shows the obtuseness of their moral sense. They might fight the truth, crucify the truth, yet never would they know what it was they fought; whom it was they crucified. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." They knew not because they believed not; they believed not because the narrow range of their perverted faith shut them out from all possible sympathy with the truth and love of God, or love for man. They could give no reason for taking the life of Christ, but the hostility begotten of cross purposes. He was an obstacle in their path; He dwarfed their teaching, scorned their self-sufficiency, darkened their political outlook. For this they had determined to silence Him; for this they would try, convict, and crucify Him. The accused already knew the reason which aroused their hatred. As we have seen, He charged it home on them unflinchingly. The thoughts of their hearts had been laid bare as though they stood before

the judgment seat of Him whom they were now condemning. Yet another man was to penetrate the veil which hung between the motive and the deed. It is recorded that Pilate, the Roman governor, knew that it was for envy that they had delivered him. Strange anomaly. Judge and prisoner are in agreement. Both bear testimony against the accusers. Wrong against right, falsehood against truth, was the real principle involved. Christ saw it. Pilate saw it. Many standing before that judgment seat were yet to see it.

My Christian friends, when Christ is on trial to-day, as He is here and everywhere, do we recognize the principles which control opposition to Him? "Why go ye about to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth?" is a question as pertinent to this age and land as to the first century in Judea. Is the envy, mockery, and scorn of truth of the present different from that of early times? Is influence and authority and custom less often availed of to crush a righteous cause in order to advance personal interests? Do we hear fewer sneers and flings at a faith which men do not understand, and whose merits they fail to appreciate? Would the personal reception of Christ in our great cities differ from that which He received at Jerusalem? If it were known that His coming sounded the doom of personal aggrandizement, whether in wealth, religion, or politics; would stamp upon all

machinations, trickery, and fraud; would rule with a rod of iron those who refused allegiance, — would any principles of justice or sense of guilt hinder tremendous and organized opposition. The world may have little anxiety concerning truth in the abstract, little thought for those who preach it, or those who practise it. But when truth becomes a power which can be seen and felt, the situation is changed. The moral power of the truth, purity, peace, and love may be ignored; but truth in a changed aspect, with followers at its back, with powers of detection, arrest, conviction, judgment, cannot be ignored nor misunderstood. This answers the question of Christ, "Why go ye about to kill me?" Not because of anything which had to do with truth, but simply because He stood in their road, where there was room for only one to pass. It was the old question, God or Mammon. They had chosen Mammon, and now found that the power of God was in the opposition. For the truth of God they cared nothing: the power they would meet with power.

Is it not plain that the situation is similar among ourselves? It is the truth as an opposing, interfering power that the world resists. The truth, as faith, love, hope, they know nothing of, and care less. At times they honor it with a condescending patronage. It increases the faithfulness of employees, insures the usefulness of

servants, lessens the competition in the race for earthly prizes, occasionally brings a little variety into lives which count only politic motives, and regard principles in the light of amusing, though perplexing, entertainment. But some day the truth stands out in new relations; some one discovers that truth has a bearing on error; is not altogether passive, as was supposed; becomes conscious of a power of light as well as a power of darkness; discovers there are other wills in the universe besides his own; discerns a coming storm; spreads the alarm. A little while, and the powers of good and evil are in collision. Now press the question, "Why go ye about to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth?" And, first, we may hear the indifferent question, "What is truth?" But following it we shall hear the defiant cry of more determined spirits, "We will not have this man to rule over us."

At times we hear it said that Christians are responsible for existing opposition to truth; that if Christians fully exemplified their faith, the world would respond, Christianity would become self-evidencing, the kingdom of Christ would be established. Can such a position be justified by history, doctrine, or prophecy? Could we not say with greater truth, and maintain it by more convincing arguments, that the closer the Church draws to Christ, the more unworldly it becomes; the more speedily it draws upon itself the persecu-

tion of the world. "The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." A share in Christ's character necessitates a share in Christ's treatment. The more recognizable the Christian, the surer is the mark he makes for his foes. True, the Christian faith may for long periods grow in obscurity; the universal bearing of its claims and tendencies may escape detection; it may grow in favor with man as well as God, until it begins to cramp and fetter the worldly forces, the spiritual tyrannies among which it has taken root. When it makes the law of God the law of the land; when it interferes with nefarious trades, applies the truth equally to all, — high and low, rich and poor, employer and employee, — taxes them individually with sin, commands them to repent and humble themselves before God; when it undertakes to make clear to the world that truth is the most aggressive power in the universe, not only because of its moral virtues, but because it is backed by the controlling, dominant, masterful power of an omnipotent God, who will not suffer His will to be disputed, who will not give His glory to another, — then we may hear the low murmuring of the approaching storm. The Church has borne its witness against the world; and the world refuses to yield its inheritances, its glories, its pride and wealth without a struggle.

When we are tempted to exaggerate the influence of truth and deify the power of moral excellencies to win the world to recognize and practise them, it can never be sufficiently emphasized that the incomparable example of moral excellence furnished to man in Christ Jesus our Lord did not accomplish such a result. Christ did not assume nor anticipate a general acceptance of the truth as the result of His life, nor did He encourage His disciples to look for a recognition which He had failed to gain. On the contrary, He assures them that on account of their discipleship they must share the experience of the Master whose disciples they were. In the history immediately subsequent to the death of Christ we may readily trace the realization of the truth contained in the words, "The servant is not greater than his Lord." The same experience awaited the early Christians as attended Christ; first, favor with all the people, — then persecution. But while many may feel that the teaching of Christ does not promise them exemption from persecution, and may recognize that the Word of God furnishes them no ground for surprise at the hours of trial which come upon the world, but rather forewarns them, nevertheless, from their judgment of the present chapter of the world's history, they would readily pronounce the text which has been chosen as inapplicable to the time. They would maintain that to speak of persecution in the present day is to

give words a rendering which they will not bear, and that to discuss principles now inoperative is useless and unprofitable. It may be replied that so far as persecution is referred to State organizations, whether priestly or secular, it is no longer active. But the relation of Church and State is not under discussion. An entirely different line is drawn, — that of the Church and the world; of righteousness and unrighteousness. He that doeth righteousness is born of God; he that doeth not righteousness is not of God. These are the principles involved. It is not a question of opinion, a matter of words; it is a question between righteousness active and unrighteousness active. It is a mistake to consider Christians as a school, holding certain opinions, and the world a school, holding opposite opinions. The line run between believers and the unbelieving is not run according to theological tenets, but according to godliness or ungodliness. On the one side are ranged idolatry, blasphemy, murder, theft, covetousness; on the other, reverence and love of God, regard for life, integrity, purity, and truth. It is a mistake to separate the head from the heart, practice from doctrine, words from works. "Shew me thy faith without thy works," says Saint James, "and I will shew thee my faith by my works." The Church and the world are not to be recognized according to their formulas of belief but by their lives. "Thou

believest that there is one God. Thou doest well," but that does not prevent classification with devils. "They also believe and tremble." Dividing the world, then, on these lines, according to its deeds rather than its thoughts, will any one maintain that the conflict is less sharp, less bitter now than centuries ago? We are inclined to magnify the evil of the past as well as its good. There is a deep-seated dislike against reading history for instruction. As a matter of idle gossip and inquisitive disrespectful curiosity, we examine the dress and costumes of the past, much as uncivilized tribes scrutinize the appearance and dress of foreigners. By distortion and exaggeration we lift it so far above human experience, or sink it so far below it, that the vital connection between the past and present is broken, and we look upon the figures of history as visitors from another sphere, whose every detail we study with close and minute attention, and yet with no further benefit or profit than to enlarge the list of human curiosities.

The resurrection of Christ was a unique event in the world's history; His crucifixion was not. It was not even a strange or surprising event. From the blood of Abel to that of Zacharias, Jewish history furnished many examples of outrage against man and God. The spirit which actuated them all was the same spirit which prompted Cain to slay his brother. "And wherefore slew he him? Be-

cause his own works were evil and his brother's righteous."

The temptation is strong to draw untenable distinctions in acts of wrong-doing or injustice because of difference in times or surroundings. The crucifixion of Christ is not to be separated from the evil which reigned before and has reigned since; it loses its significance, if we consider it only as the capstone of the mass of human iniquity. The actors in it were men of like passions with ourselves. Their lineal descendants are among us, and equally with their ancestors possess the demoniac spirit. It is not the unexampled depravity of the personal actors in the crucifixion which that event is intended to teach us, but rather the depravity working through all time, of which the crucifixion is the most conspicuous illustration. The light of the cross streams backward and forward upon the unending line of human sin and wickedness, revealing to mankind the spirit and outcome of all ungodliness.

"Why go ye about to kill me?" Shall we deny the principle which this question reveals, — the deadly antagonism between the spirit of the world and the spirit of Christ, — because events require time for development, and because we do not see the result of principles until the time is ripe for their issue? Is it peace when two armed powers are biding their time, or shall we deny this principle because our

perceptions have become so blunted that we can hardly discriminate between light and darkness, between Christ and satan? If our eyes fail in discernment, can we tell actual conflict from a mock battle until we ourselves fall; or shall we deny this principle because through lack of resistance there has been no fighting? Because we have given up the field, assented to the worship of the evil one and formed a compact of goodfellowship with his followers, shall we therefore say that there is concord between Christ and Belial?

Men do not seek to further their material interests by deceiving themselves regarding the different influences which affect them, nor do they trust to the inductions of a brief half-hour as furnishing principles for the business of a lifetime. Misrepresentation of the situation effects nothing, either in material or spiritual things. Ungrounded hopes do not realize themselves in either sphere. Neither affords encouragement to stupidity or shortsightedness.

"Why go ye about to kill me?" The friends of Christ seem to have been the last to admit the possibility of His seizure and death. Even Christ Himself could not persuade them of it. The friends of Christ to-day are under the same temptation to ignore the great lessons of Christ's death; to ignore the death of martyrs; to ignore the sacrifice at which every advance in truth is purchased. The

hope excites the wish, the wish the expectation, that the conflict between good and evil is one in which we may now engage with assurance of protection to life, reputation, and possessions; that it is simply ridiculous to suppose the possibility of risk or loss in ranging ourselves on the side of Jesus Christ; that the signs of the times are propitious to the easy practice and certain reward of faith. Righteousness is no longer militant but triumphant.

"Thou hast a devil, who goeth about to kill thee," springs as quickly from the lips of the unthinking multitude as it did in the time of Christ. In four months the prophecy was accomplished. The just had suffered at the hands of the unjust. Interference with the politics, morals, and religion of the day had at last provoked extreme measures. It had become necessary that either the nation, as it was then constituted, should perish, or that the one man should die who embodied in himself the principles which threatened social order. The consummation of Jewish hostility to Christ was reached on a question of practical politics. "If we let this man alone the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." So, to-day, it is not Christianity as a theory, but in its concrete applications, which meets resistance, — which endangers every form of evil, and is in its turn endangered by evil. It is not the existence of God, of truth, of

righteousness, which alarms iniquity. It is only when iniquity discovers that the truths which it previously considered pious opinions are becoming real and active forces, that it awakens to danger and finds itself engaged in a life and death struggle. It is well for Christians if they understand the conflict as well as their opponents. It is well for the children of God if they grasp the situation as quickly as the children of the devil. Can the leopard change his spots? Wherever greed or oppression can raise its head, it does; wherever scepticism can drive out faith, it does; wherever the devil can most effectually resist God, he does; whatever instruments are most ready to his hand, he uses. The divorce of morals from religion, of conduct from principle, was his method in the time of Christ. This divorce once accomplished, it was easy to find material to smother all attempts to reunite them. How far does this method avail now? How far has it been successful? What departments of human life and activity have been separated from the operation of Christian principle? Commerce is the foremost to claim for itself the abnegation of principle. Covetousness, which finds in its own desire a sufficient justification for disregarding all laws, human and divine, holds a firm grip on the traffic between man and man. Commerce, which has always held its own in the demoralization of every weaker nation or individual with whom it has to do,

finds no place in its ethics for Christian principle. Attempt opposition to its methods, to its practice of profiting, through the weakness, ignorance, or credulity of man, and you find speedily with whom you have to do. The attempt to mitigate any evil which is profitable is a sure way to find how many are interested in it. Attempt to block any form of vice in which the evil propensities of our nature are pandered to, and the difficulty of making headway against the vested rights of the kingdom of satan will show in what security those rights are held. Again, the field of politics is one from which principle is excluded, made a jest of, ridiculed, cast out. Vice hardly pays the compliment of secrecy to virtue. Venality and corruption become the open boast of those who have practised them and profited by their practice. Such may well look upon the authoritative teaching of Christ as antagonistic to their existence, — as a power which threatens to deprive them of place and influence. But besides the subversion of the two relations of man with man, trade and government, there are other relations of life in which it is sought to exclude the rule of Christ. It is sought to cast off the obligation of social relations, — of husband and wife, of father and son, of neighbor and neighbor. Again the cry is heard, "We will not have this man to rule over us." Relations established and enforced in the divine economy are ignored and defied. Instead of recog-

nizing the divine origin of these relations, that God hath created us, and not we ourselves, it is affirmed that relations and laws are of our own creation ; that none are binding on us except those which we have ourselves created ; that all else is tyranny. "We will not have this man to rule over us." Neither trade nor government nor domestic life can suffer the intolerable yoke which He would seek to thrust upon us. "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

My Christian hearers, among those whom Christ addressed there were friends and enemies. Both may receive a lesson from his words, — a lesson from the events which followed fast upon his words. Hatred of truth, of Christ, of God was successful in the murderous plot by which it sought to perpetuate itself and escape divine obligations. The Lord of the vineyard had come to claim His own, and they cast Him out. Haters of truth abound to-day ; but let them remember that in their hate they seal their doom. A generation had not passed away after the crucifixion of Christ, and Jerusalem, the seat of bitterest enmity against Him had ceased from being a city. We may accept the national application. Even a republic is not exempt from the operation of divine vengeance, when it has once secured for itself exemption from obedience to divine law. But we should remember that whatever may be the fate of nations, the most important application to ourselves is personal ; our life is individual, not national.

Within one generation at the longest every blasphemer against God must appear before God to answer for his personal opposition to the Creator and ruler of the universe. If there are any such here to-day, let them consider the past long-suffering of God which leadeth them to repentance; let them remember that it was for them Christ prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

There is still time for the repentant prayer, "God have mercy upon me a sinner." But, my friends, there is a sense in which these words are applicable to us all, — applicable to the strife which is waged in every human heart. What opposition do we make to the truth? What if the Lord of the universe should flash forth the Word of His truth upon the shortcomings of our lives; would ask our reasons for disregarding His Word, for obstructing His rule, for crushing out the life with which He would quicken the world, — would we bow to the truth, or hurry it to the judgment hall?

It is only through the steadfast recognition of the authority of God, of His will revealed through Christ, that we shall be secured from partaking of the worldly hatred against Him.

II.

SALVATION FOR SINNERS.

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Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. — 1 Timothy i. 15.

The life of Paul before and after conversion is to be sharply distinguished. In the one period he was the chief of sinners, in the other, chief among saints. Let us consider this change of nature, its historical foundation, and the change in life and experience to which it gave rise.

Paul pronounces himself the chief of sinners. Why? We shall be able to answer this question, if we notice the substance of the confession. It was merely the history of his career before conversion. Ask those whom Paul had driven from their homes, dragged before magistrates, imprisoned, beaten, stoned, — ask these witnesses whether it was the witness of an inflamed consciousness of an oversensitive nature which led Paul to pronounce himself chief of sinners. Hard, merciless, pitiless, he compelled them to blaspheme. No sign of sym-

pathy or compassion from that flinty heart. Later on, Peter might say our beloved Brother Paul; but what Christian in all Judea thought of calling him loved or loving then? Saul dragooning the Christian Church, breathing out persecution, filled with madness, relentless, the embodiment of hate, is a historical figure we seldom consider.

We speak of Paul's conversion: we seldom speak of his life before conversion, and yet it is that life to which he refers, when he pronounces himself chief of sinners, as not meet to be an apostle, because he persecuted the Church of God and wasted it. Was his verdict just? Would his fellowmen concur in the estimate he gives of himself? Let us not confound sin as a possibility with sin as committed. It is not the sinfulness which Paul finds lurking in his nature which he accuses himself of, but the sins which had gone forth as part of history. On trial before Festus, Paul had protested that against the Jews he had done no wrong; but what of Christians? — he could assert no such harmlessness with regard to them. He had taken the lead in cruel, determined persecution; not content with dispersing the Church in Jerusalem, he had pursued its adherents to foreign cities, resolute in his purpose to bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

Our thoughts are seldom directed to Paul as a persecutor. We forget to look at him in this aspect; yet we are called upon to do so to understand him

aright. And what is the judgment which we must pronounce upon Paul as a sinner, upon a man whose fanaticism and bigotry had crushed out all the humaner impulses, who anticipated the time when violence and murder should be pressed into the service of God? "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief," was not an expression of extreme humility, but of truth; and it was the foundation of Paul's Christian experience. "By the grace of God, I am what I am." Paul by himself — ignorant, arrogant, stern, fanatical, all the good that was in him turned to evil by false conceptions of God and duty — was "chief of sinners." But on that eventful journey to Damascus came the change which was to render Paul chief among Christians. The pre-eminence he so long held among sinners was abandoned forever. He was now to maintain the faith which once he destroyed. The proof of Christianity to the Christian is his experience. Conversion merely means that a man's heart is open to a phase of experience to which before he was a stranger. It may be conscious or unconscious; a man's recollections do not always carry him back to spiritual birth, and, if they do, he cannot always give a satisfactory account of the occurrence, excepting that he knew nothing once, saw nothing, but now he both sees and knows. The reasonableness of Christianity is one thing, Christianity as life-giving truth, another. You may prove to a blind

man that there is a world of sense to which he is a stranger, but you cannot bring him in sympathy with it. You may prove to many a man the truth of Christianity, but to bring him into vital connection with it is beyond your power. No man can recognize the truth if there is no truth in him; he will simply measure it by the falsehood to which he is accustomed. No man will accept Christ, unless Christ be in the man, turning him to Himself. Christ came into the world to save sinners.

Paul was hunting down Christ, driving him to earth, when a new vision, a new understanding, a new revelation of Jesus the despised Nazarene was made to him, which he had never before seen or experienced. Christ had been there from the first, only Paul had not seen Him. Not the righteous, sinners Jesus came to save. What gives the charm, the value, the inspiration, to stories of danger, of adventure, but the straitened circumstances of the adventurers, into which the hope of rescue and deliverance had come? And the reader or listener responds with quick sympathy as the escape from cold or famine or battle is recited. Whether it is the forlorn hope of the starved and frozen explorer, or the extremity of an army, all are conscious of the suppressed emotion which attends the recital of the story, — the despair, the last counsel, the glimmering of hope, its increase, the triumphant issue. Men hard pressed still know what salvation is, and are able to awaken

in others an interest in their experiences. Paul had found that salvation of which all other salvations from cold, hunger, thirst, fire and sword, from pestilence and sudden death are but faint and feeble illustrations. Thenceforth it is the theme of which he never wearies, — sin and righteousness, death and life, released from the one, saved unto the other. These thoughts fill his mind; they have been burned into his life.

Paul had been chief of anarchists; he had brought all the fire of his ardent temperament into play against the law and order of the kingdom of God. The unrest, the rage, the bitter hatred belonging to sin, anarchy, and rebellion had possessed him. "Saul, Saul, it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Assailant of the kingdom of God, rebel against Jesus Christ, it is useless for you to attempt to destroy the foundation which I have laid. It is useless for you to attempt to subvert the principles of my kingdom. Live in accordance with them, or die opposing them. And then through the very being of Paul surged the meaning of the vision which interrupted his maddened course. He realized his opposition to the Lord of the universe and to His laws; and as the grandeur, power, beauty, and love of newly revealed truth dawned upon him, the rebellion in his soul was hushed. The proud, defiant spirit humbled itself. The sin and disorder and unrighteousness in his soul crumbled away. Faith,

love, and hope had taken their place. He stands in new relations to all things. All things stand in new relations to him. He is now keeping step with the commandments of God. No longer will the pricks be needed to compel his footsteps to mark the limits of the measure ordained by God. The cry, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" is the sign that rebellion has become obedience, that discord has become harmony, that another soul has entered the kingdom of heaven.

The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Paul knew what it was to be a sinner. He was to know now what it was to be a Christian. None other of the apostles knew by actual experience what it was to be chief of sinners, and yet be saved. The revelation of God in Christ Jesus had raised them to the highest elevation, but it had not raised them from an equal depth. None had been confronted in acts of high-handed rebellion.

Paul was chief of sinners, but he became chief among saints, because he recognized his Lord and Saviour; and, in recognizing Him, he saw his rebellion, his sin, his guilt, in its true light. Henceforth, no follower of God would be a stancher defender of God's truth and of His laws than Paul. Henceforth, the stoutest-hearted rebel would be the most loyal subject. He who had been leader of the powers of darkness would now be leader in the armies of God, — a guiding spirit, whose influence

would be felt among all the companies of Christians on earth. The revelations of Jesus Christ, made to him, he would communicate to the ends of the earth. His brethren in Christ he urged, rebuked, exhorted, comforted, loved. He would have all to follow in his footsteps, even as he followed in the footsteps of Christ. He would have every man receive the fulness of the revelation of Christ which he had received. "Would to God that not only thou, but all that hear me this day were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." His body might be bound. He would not wish that experience for any man, but O that he might give to them the freedom of his spirit. "Jesus Christ came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." This was the burden of Paul's preaching. His own salvation was the proof of its truth. He would urge us to consider the loving-kindness, the long-suffering of God, so clearly shown in saving so great a sinner.

He would press home on all the encouragement which they might gain from the knowledge of such an enemy of Christ having been received and forgiven; "and for this cause I obtained mercy that in me as chief might Jesus Christ shew forth all His long-suffering as an example of them which should hereafter believe."

This, then, is the lesson which we are to receive from the words of the text, "Faithful is the say-

ing, and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." It is because Christ came into the world to save sinners that Paul was saved. It is because Jesus Christ came as Saviour that we may be saved. The day of salvation has dawned, but it has not yet closed. To-day, the Saviour calls. All sinners, as well as the chief, need salvation. Will you not look at your Saviour long enough to recognize Him? Shall we not let the knowledge of God, shining in the face of Jesus Christ, blind us to lesser worldly lights? Be assured that when Jesus Christ blinds our eyes to this world, it is that He may open them on another, which is illuminated not by the light of an earthly sun, but by the Lamb of God. If both lights are shining for us at once, shall we not close them toward earth, and open them toward heaven? Our natural eye is pained by conflicting lights, and so it is with the eye of our understanding. The combination of earth and heaven, of Christ and the world, obedience and disobedience, will not bring us peace. Let us hear our Lord. "I am the light of the world. Look unto me all ye ends of the earth, and be ye saved."

III.

CHRIST OUR LIFE.

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I am the vine, ye are the branches. — John xv. 5.

The community of the life of the believer with the life of Christ is a truth made clear to us through many different forms of representation. It is presented in the form of analogy, of symbolic utterance and symbolic rite, and again it finds expression in literal statement. In the words which have been chosen as the text, the representation is given in analogical form. It is an object-lesson in spiritual truth drawn from the processes of nature. The vine, one of the most familiar objects with which a Jewish audience was acquainted, is chosen as the basis of the truth to be conveyed, and the special feature of the vine to which attention is drawn is one which every observer would recognize and appreciate, — the relation of the branches to the vine. The life of the branch was in the vine. Cut off from this centre of life, not only was the power of fruitage destroyed but its own existence speedily declined. The branch did not possess an independent

life; the condition of its meeting the aim of its existence was continuance in the vine.

"I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit; for, apart from me, ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast off as a branch, and is withered."

Spiritual truth is frequently enforced by presenting an analogy between the processes of the natural and spiritual world; and, in this instance, we have authority of Christ that the analogy between the natural and the spiritual has actual substantive existence. We are thus assured that the resemblance noticed is real and not fancied. The relations of spiritual existence have a like reality, and are possessed of the same characteristics as the corresponding facts of physical life with which they are compared. The branches inhere in the vine: we inhere in Christ; and the vital union subsisting between the vine and the branches represents the relationship between ourselves and Christ. As the life of the vine passes into the branch and constitutes the life of the branch, insuring its existence and power of fruitage, so the life of Christ constitutes our life, and is the active agent and vital force effecting power of usefulness.

Again we find this truth expressed symbolically in the discourse based on the miraculous supply of loaves and fishes, as narrated in the Gospel of John.

"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him" (John vi. 53–56).

The same truth receives outward symbolic form in the Lord's Supper. "And . . . Jesus took bread, . . . and said, Take, eat: this is my body (Mark xiv. 22). And he took the cup, . . . and gave it to them . . . (v. 23), and . . . said . . .: This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many" (v. 24).

Thus we have a constant outward memorial that the life of Christ, poured out for us so far as His body was concerned, is the source and quickening power of our spiritual life.

But the teaching of Christ, even in the discourse we have quoted, did not lack express definite utterances of the spiritual truth implied in the symbolic language. "He that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John vi. 35). "For this is the will of my Father that every one that beholdeth the Son and believeth on Him, shall have eternal life" (v. 40). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth hath eternal life" (v. 47). "It is the spirit that

quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (v. 63). But notwithstanding this plain exhibition of the spiritual meaning of the words of Christ, the illustrations which he used, which might have served to deepen and intensify their meaning, were interpreted in a gross, realistic sense, which obscured the truth intended to be conveyed, and made the illustration itself gross and absurd. Nicodemus marvels at the second birth. The woman of Samaria expresses a desire for the water which shall quench physical thirst. The hungry multitude seeks earthly manna. They fail to discern the truth which Christ sought to impress upon them. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (John vi. 63).

As Christ endeavors to show that spiritual life subsists in Him, and flows from Him as its source, and uses the chief supports of physical life — meat, bread, and water — to bring out the reality of the relationship, and by analogy from the world of the flesh which profiteth nothing, to convey a knowledge of the truths belonging to the spiritual sphere which quickeneth, — they eagerly grasped at the outward, fleshly idea. They craved bread and meat and water; but, failing to discern the truth veiled in these symbols, they questioned among themselves, How can this Man be the bread which came down from heaven? "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" The monstrous character of the thought repels them. From that time, many left Him, and

walked no more with Him. But the twelve maintained their loyalty, recognizing the truth of Christ's word, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." They answer His appeal, "Will ye also go away?" by the confession: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we have believed and know that Thou art the Holy One of God." The apostles accepted the revealed personality of Christ, and of necessity accepted His teaching. Then, too, they received clearer instruction than the multitude, and the truth was presented to them in simpler forms. They were better qualified than the average hearer to give an intelligent account of Christ's teaching; but it was not until Christ's ascension and the outpouring of the spirit, that they were led into the fulness of truth. They had not like many disciples followed a false line of reasoning which led them to an impossible and absurd explanation of what they did not understand, and then, by logical sequence, to reject Christ because of the absurdity which they themselves had originated.

We may naturally look, then, to the teaching of the apostles to find the truth of union with Christ as it is prefigured in His discourses and symbolized in the Lord's Supper, brought out in its full spiritual significance.

The more fully we comprehend this spiritual significance, the more ready we shall be to appreciate

the truth as clothed in parable or presented in its permanent embodied form in the sacramental observance. That the spiritual is intended to dominate the figure and the symbol, giving them the force and value which they possess, is evident from the fact that the world of physical life is never spoken of as containing or conveying spiritual life. This is a principle educed from the Scriptures as a whole, and brought out most clearly by Christ. The life with which God had endowed the world previous to Christ and pre-eminently since his coming is especially disassociated from any physical manifestation. "Though we have known Christ in the flesh, yet, now henceforth know we Him no more." The apostles knew Christ; but spiritual perception, and not flesh and blood, had revealed it unto them.

Christ had declared that the Fatherhood of Abraham on the natural side saved no man. That Christ should make us sharers of His natural life through veritable flesh and blood is as great an absurdity as the Jews thought it; that the actual body and blood of Christ should be used to convey spiritual life involves as great a misunderstanding of the ways of God as to insist that the spiritual life of Abraham was conveyed to his descendants through flesh and blood.

Further, the realistic conception of symbols in the New Testament is precluded by the spiritual interpretation of corresponding symbols when they

occur in the Old. "Your Fathers . . . did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink; and the rock was Christ" (1 Cor. x. 1–4). The manna and water supplied in the desert, with which Christ is identified, while typically it represented in physical forms the spiritual life flowing from God, neither constituted that life, nor did it convey it. It is evident then that, in the use of similar symbols, the bread and wine under the New Testament, representing the same truth as the manna and water of the Old, are not to be understood as possessing inherent efficacy or any unnatural character which does not actually belong to them, but to demonstrate that so surely as these elements are the stay and support of physical life, so surely is Christ the source and sustenance of spiritual life. Yet these two, the physical and the spiritual, are distinct. One does not trespass upon the ground of the other; they are not to be confused. Neither is there transmutation nor interchange between them. If we admit the force and emphasis which Scripture lays upon the separation and distinctness of these two elements, not in the sense of one as sinful and the other not, but in the sense that they belonged to separate spheres, and that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, — if we admit this separation, then we are at once prepared to gain intelligent, clear conceptions of the

relation which these two spheres, though separate, sustain to each other. We thus avoid the cloudiness of mysticism and the absurdity of realism. The natural and the spiritual are found to exist side by side, running in parallel lines and mutually interpreting each other. As we contemplate the significance of the facts and processes of the natural world, which is the sign of the spiritual, they become replete with spiritual meaning, and, as we contemplate the spiritual knowledge thus gained, we return with quickened powers of appreciation to the natural and physical world of sense, which is the divinely constituted symbolism of the spiritual. Nature reveals to us more of God; and the revelation thus gained gives us a deeper insight into nature, so that the natural and the spiritual become alternate stepping stones by which we may ascend toward a higher spiritual understanding.

The figurative and symbolic teachings of Christ thus become sources of knowledge which we can never exhaust. Not until we have solved the mystery of physical life in the world of nature can we attain the fulness of spiritual knowledge which Christ reveals to us through the facts and processes of the natural world; but the farther we penetrate the mysterious relation of living organisms to the natural principle of life which dominates and controls their growth and development; the farther we understand the mysterious vital processes by

which all forms of life are sustained, — the deeper insight we shall have into the truth which our Lord expressed by likening Himself to the vine of which we are branches, and by representing Himself as the bread of heaven on which we feed. It is in Him as a spiritual vine that our life inheres. It is from Him that we gain the sustenance, — the flesh and blood of our spiritual life.

But while Christ spake in parables and symbols representative of the truth, He also spoke openly and simply to the apostles while He was with them, to the apostles through the spirit when He was taken away from them; and that which they could not understand nor appreciate while He was with them, they began to comprehend as the spirit revealed its meaning. "We have the mind of Christ," says the apostle. "Your members are members of Christ; your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost in whom God dwells." Could identification be more complete? Thoughts, words, and deeds, body and soul, as well as spirit quickened by God. "For me to live is Christ," says the apostle. It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me. "The words that I speak unto you," says Christ, "they are spirit and they are life." So it was with the words of the apostle; so it is with the words of each and every Christian to-day in whom the spirit of God dwells. The inspiration is one with that of Christ, one

with the apostles, one with the Church universal, since the spirit of God which dwelt in Christ is one with the spirit which dwells in us, by which we become partakers of the divine nature. Christ's human nature was like ours; our divine nature is like His. As He was the God-man, so we are God-men; "for if He called them Gods to whom the Word of God came," the Scripture cannot be broken. If we are then one with Christ, let us take to ourselves the comfort and strength and peace and happiness which it brings. The relation of God to Christ is His relation with us. That reliance which He placed in the Father it is our privilege to depend upon; that answer to prayer never made in vain may become our experience. Let us go forth, then, in the strength of the Lord; for all power is given to man in heaven and on earth. That power becomes ours through Him; and if we follow Him in His humiliation, with the invisible but constant presence of the Almighty God to depend upon, we shall be identified with Him also in His exaltation. To Christ, to the apostles, to all who keep the word of His patience, was the promise made: "I will also keep thee; and I will make thine enemies to fall down and worship at thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."

But one word remains. If Christ has made us one with Him, let us remember that the extension

and enlargement of His body depends on us. Let us see to it that when the roll-call of the universe is heard, not one name shall be left out through our failure to carry the message of redeeming love to every human soul.

IV.

LOVE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

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Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. — HEBREWS i. 9.

THE Christian life is here presented to us in the character of Him who was its head, as a matter of choice, inclination, affection. The direction of the soul toward righteousness has not been that of external control, but of inward sympathy.

The inner life — its tastes and aspirations — has gone out in the direction of righteousness. There has been no thought of attaining self-righteousness, of rigid obedience to an external law, nor of a stoical subordination to the demands of duty, but a free, natural, and unbiassed choice following the dictates of the heart, which has sought to control and direct its activities according to the highest and holiest laws of the kingdom of God. Such was the witness of God to the character and disposition of His Son.

The side of the truth thus displayed to us is apart from the ordinary and general presentation

of the Christian life. Conflict and duty are the two phases in which this is commonly portrayed. The compelling power of a strong will subjugating the life in the midst of adverse circumstances is the picture of faith commonly held up to us. The will, and not the affections, is represented as the prime mover of Christian life; and hence restraint rather than freedom, compulsion rather than love, the letter of the law rather than the spirit, — is the dominant force.

"Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity." In greater or less measure it may be said that these words apply to all Christians; and did they but recognize their truthful application in their own experience, it would bring them greater satisfaction with the past, and greater encouragement for the future.

One of the greatest obstacles to prevent a clear conception of union with God, of oneness with Christ, of being partakers of His love, of His will, of His purposes; one of the greatest hindrances to prevent recognition of our being sons of God and of the blessings which flow from a right understanding of that fact, — is found in our blindness in not recognizing the work of God's spirit in our ordinary and daily life; in not recognizing His spirit in the daily choosing of good and rejection of evil; in not recognizing His spirit in our right reasoning overcoming sophistry; in not recognizing

His spirit working love within our heart in the sphere of earthly relationships, effecting faithfulness and devotion toward the smaller circle of family and kindred, while expanding our love and sympathy toward mankind.

We overlook the simplicity of the gospel in furnishing abundant and available proofs of faith. Laying stress upon great things, we overlook the lesser events of life, in which we might find more certain and available evidence to certify our faith, and assure us of the presence of the spirit. Let us consider for a moment some of the influences which lead us to miss the truth while earnestly searching for it.

In the first place, our natural impulse is to associate the idea of faith with a life and conduct at once difficult and unnatural to our tastes and dispositions. Hence we make the mistake of not observing how far our tastes, dispositions, and strivings after higher and nobler living are already in accord with the spirit of Christ; how far following Christ is a matter of developing His spirit already in us, and not a total change of character and disposition. This applies very largely to all who have received Christian training and education, but also to others outside of the Christian pale, who have endeavored to frame their lives according to the light that is within them.

When Peter was directed to the Roman centurion,

a righteous man and one that feared God, the impression which the apostle received from God's dealings with Cornelius found instant utterance. "Of a truth, I perceive, that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." And the truth of which Peter was the accredited bearer did not reflect on the imperfect faith which the centurion had formerly held, but was the natural development of that faith into the full light of the gospel. When Paul found disciples at Ephesus who had known only the baptism of John, he did not criticise their partial knowledge, but linked it to faith in Christ, of whom John had spoken.

When the rich young man appealed to Christ for an answer to his question, What good thing must I do to inherit eternal life? Our Lord first directed his attention to the commandments; and having found that he had been faithful to them, He did not answer him that there was nothing in his former obedience to the divine law, as he had understood it. On the contrary, our Lord plainly admits that so far it was well. He had been in line with the children of God, — with faith and obedience to God, so far. The one thing he needed was to continue as he had begun; to follow out to its natural conclusion the obedience to God, which he had already manifested. The partial surrender, the

partial growth, needed only to complete itself in the line of its former development. His refusal to heed Christ's final command does not come within the scope of our illustration. It is sufficient to observe that Christ recognized and admitted the elements of his life already Christian; that they did not require change, but extension and development. So with regard to many. If we exercised care in observing how far our life had already been permeated by the spirit of God, and how far His commandments had been a matter of daily practice, we should be able to see that in a measure a love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity had already begun, and in it we should find evidence of the existence of faith within us.

In the evidences of parental care, filial affection, tried friendship, in fidelity to daily tasks, in affections inclining us to the worship of God, to attendance on His Word, to companionship with fellow believers, — in all these things we might find evidence of the goodness of God working within us, as we find in the external world of rain and sunshine and fruitful harvests the goodness of God working without us.

A second obstacle which presents itself in obscuring our faith and causing doubts of its existence is the failure to distinguish between mature and immature faith. Instead of drawing the line of life between belief and unbelief, between Christ and the world,

it is drawn between the beginnings of faith and its fuller development, between faith just begun and faith of long standing. As though the mustard seed should dispute and hesitate, hang in uncertainty about its nature, because it had not yet attained the dimensions of a tree; as though it should deny its origin and capacities, its relationship and kindred, because it saw no signs in its tender shoots and pliant branches of the strength which should afford a resting-place for the birds of heaven.

The strength of purpose, fixedness of aim, the set of affection, which they know as the characteristics of faith, become a stumbling-block to many because they do not perceive that they are in the line of attaining them. They believe in their existence because they trust the testimony and life of others who have experienced them in heart and manifested them in life; but they overlook the tendencies toward a like faith within themselves. They look for a faith above their grasp, beyond their reach, — at a distance from them, instead of faith near them, within their heart. When Moses gave his last commands to the children of Israel, he said to them, "This command which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou

mayest do it" (Deut. xxx. 11, 12, 14). As the requirements of faith under the old dispensation were not an unusual nor strange thing, so under the gospel, Paul quotes the words of Moses, as applying to the faith of Christ, "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. x. 8, 9).

It is not in the unwonted achievements and experiences of others that we find the ground of our own faith. The soil in which their faith took root may be different from ours. Their lot may have lain under darker or sunnier skies; their faith may have been clearer or more obscure, more direct or more winding. It may have followed the plain or climbed the mountain, traversed the desert or led through fruitful vales. As varied as the experiences of those who seek the frozen north or tropical heat may be the spiritual experiences of those who dwell in the ever-changing circles of human environment. The situations and events which have given bent to the faith of others may be strange to us.

It is within the sphere of circumstances in which we have been placed, which have thus far attended us, that we may look for the existence and sustenance of personal faith. "Thou hast loved

righteousness, and hated iniquity." These words are the touchstone of nature, disposition, and character. There is no dividing line which sinks deeper. There is none which discriminates more sharply between the objects which present themselves to human experience. They apply pre-eminently to the Son of God, since none other had such a wide range of evil to contemplate, and so thoroughly understood its character and consequences; none other so understood righteousness in the deep and everlasting contrast which it presented to iniquity. The blessing and favor of God descended upon the responsiveness of his heart toward righteousness and its rejection of evil. "Therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." It is not in the play of our mental powers that we are called upon to love righteousness and hate iniquity, but in the actual events of life, in which sin and holiness present themselves to us, that we find the field for the exercise of our affections. The wide survey, the discriminating vision of the Son of God, may not belong to us. The rational foundation for our affection, the depths of perception which could penetrate the mystery of evil, undoubting and undaunted, we may not have; nevertheless, within the sphere of daily experience, we are able to cherish the same disposition which marked the life of our Lord. There is the same opportunity given to us to show the disposition of

our hearts. We may not see far on the path before us; but, taking each event as it occurs, we may be assured that in cultivating a sympathy and responsiveness toward every good as it declares itself to us, whether in our surroundings or in our own soul, we show a spirit identical with our Lord's. To recognize, then, not only the possible acquirement but the present possession of taste, inclination, affections which move in the direction of truth, holiness, and righteousness; to recognize a hunger and thirst for such things as the kingdom of God offers to them that seek it; to recognize that the drawing of the heart, the outgoing of the soul toward the highest aim and conduct of life, is the divinely implanted capacity which God has given us to respond to the blessings which he holds out to us; to recognize that there is given to us this motive power, this impelling force, which moves us freely and voluntarily in the direction for the supply of our greatest need and the satisfaction of our purest and loftiest aspirations, — is essential to an understanding of the highest relation of the Christian to his heavenly calling.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found

one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. xiii. 44–46). These parables teach us that the treasures of the kingdom of heaven, the contents and objects of the Christian faith, awaken as natural and ready a response in the heart of the believer as the prospect of worldly advantage excites in the mind of him who seeks it. There is the same relation between the desire and the objects of desire in the one case as in the other; the same readiness to grasp and appropriate the satisfaction of a long-felt conscious and active need. The man planning to obtain the treasure hid in the field, the merchantman endeavoring to secure the one pearl of great price, were not acting under restraint or fear or sense of duty. They followed the natural dictates of an impulse stirred into action by the attractiveness of the treasures which they sought to secure. The adaptation of their desires to the objects they valued was full and complete, and showed itself in the eagerness with which they pursued them.

Should we not accept the power of the illustration in revealing a true characteristic of sound and healthy faith, — the true spirit of the Christian's life, — not as a strange, distant, unusual and unattainable experience, but as one of the universal privileges and blessings which it is clearly revealed in the Word of God may be enjoyed by every believer. "Behold, what manner of love the Father

hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God. . . . Beloved, now are we the sons of God" (1 John iii. 1, 2). A relationship cannot be established nor changed at will. It stands as created; and all the natural tendencies which inhere in that relationship seek for expression.

"And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6).

To dwell within the sphere of this relationship, encompassed by it, is the privilege of every believer. The spirit of sonship enables us to recognize the Fatherhood of God. "The new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness;" "the spirit of God which enables us to know the things which are freely given us of God." The truth revealed to us in these words puts beyond all doubt the question that a quick, heartfelt response to Christian truth, a keen appreciation of the blessings and enjoyment to be derived from it, and an entire surrender to their pursuit and acquirement is as natural a characteristic of Christian faith and spiritual life as the appreciation of worldly honors and possessions is of the world.

"Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

V.

THE GOSPEL FOR ALL.

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And he (Peter) said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? And Cornelius said, . . . Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all): That word I say, ye know, . . . While Peter yet spake . . . the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. . . . Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? — Acts x. 28–47.

Let us consider for a few moments the persons mentioned in this narrative, and the historical circumstances which surrounded them. There is such an evident adaptation of events and personal experiences toward a single result, that we are furnished with a striking illustration of the working of the spirit of God upon the hearts of men. The

interest of the narrative lies in the relation which two men are led to sustain to each other, and the means through which this relationship is effected. Two characters are presented to us, — the one a Jew, the other a Roman. They are strangers to each other, not only from accident but from principle. By birth and education, a wall of separation had been raised between them. To break down this wall; to effect union where there had been division; to create fellowship where there had been estrangement, — is the object which binds together the incidents related in a common purpose. Through a series of providential dealings, the minds of both Jew and Roman were prepared for that personal meeting which should clarify the faith of each, opening the eyes of the Gentile to salvation through Christ, and disclosing to the Jew his brotherhood with the Gentile. The means which are used to attain this result are noticeable. A vision is sent to the Roman centurion and to the Jewish apostle, bidding the one send, the other go. Each follows the direction given him. There is no hesitation, no delay. A swift response to the heavenly vision, a ready obedience to it, produces in both characters a straightforwardness of conduct, a manly frankness of speech, which speeds the fulfilment of the divine purpose. On the fourth day, Peter stands before Cornelius. Each relates the preparatory experi-

ence which had been the means of bringing them together. Then Peter, having learned the cause for which Cornelius had summoned him, begins to speak. As a fitting introduction to the truth which is to follow, he repeats the lesson which had been taught him by the vision; but we perceive by the changed form of expression that his brief intercourse with Cornelius had already deepened and emphasized that lesson. He had stated a moment before how that God had showed him that he should call no man common or unclean. Now he exclaims: "Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." With this preface he preaches unto them Christ. He states the fact of the resurrection, and the command which was laid upon those who witnessed it to testify that God had ordained Christ to be the Judge of quick and dead, and that forgiveness of sin was through belief in His name. While he was yet speaking, the gift of the Holy Ghost was poured upon them. Peter cannot fail to understand the significance of the spiritual blessing thus bestowed. Surely, there can be no separation between those who have received like marks of God's favor. He commands them to be baptized. The conservatism of the apostle disappears. The principle which sustains it vanishes when it finds itself openly contradicted by the teaching and working of God.

But Peter was not the only one instructed by this event. His conduct was severely criticised in Jerusalem, and it became necessary for him to justify himself against the charge of companionship with the uncircumcised. His defence was a statement of the facts as they had occurred. It proved sufficient to satisfy the disputants; for when they heard it, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying: "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." It was left to the early Christian Church to receive the full revelation of the mystery that the Gentiles were fellow-heirs with the Jew in the gospel. The doctrine that the gospel was to be a universal religion was impressed upon the Church from the beginning. It was revealed to Peter, also to Paul; and there is reason to believe that in Antioch it sprang up as a natural development of the Christian consciousness; but whether developed or revealed, it is equally the work of the spirit, enforcing by outward illustration, or by the inward enlightenment of the understanding, the last command of our Lord and Saviour: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

We may rightly hold, then, that this historical episode between Peter and Cornelius serves to indicate that the bearing of the gospel is world-wide. This was the meaning it had then; it is the meaning it has now. We may be the more ready to

recognize its applicability by a change of names. In the place of Jew and Gentile let us read civilized and uncivilized; progressive and conservative; educated and ignorant. This will give the matter a more practical bearing, and awaken a more natural interest.

We need to be reminded of the brotherhood of men. The temptation is strong within us to mistake accidental differences for essential ones, and to turn in disgust and pride from those whom we cannot or will not understand, simply because we deny to them the common basis of thought and feeling on which our humanity rests, and fix our eyes only on those external features of their life which custom and indifference lead us to despise When in the presence of those whose manners or customs are ungainly, awkward, backward, we congratulate ourselves on the superiority which we possess over them by birth, education, and religion. We feel the presence of a gap in our relationship, which excites the Pharisaic spirit, " Lord, I thank Thee I am not as other men "

Let us consider for a moment the two elements of this self-righteous spirit, — pride and selfishness. They are dominant principles in our nature, and standing in close relation to each other they combine to crush the Christian spirit and to thwart Christian effort. It may be observed that we can exercise pride and selfishness only in connection

with that which we consider our own, — either something which is peculiar to ourselves, entailed in the line of our descent, and therefore inalienable, or else something standing in our own right, which it is in our power either to give or to withhold. Now we may conceive that in the former case there may exist a spirit of pride which does not take its root in selfishness; which, though false, is nevertheless grounded on a principle, on a belief, and that belief the assumption that the blessings which we enjoy are incommunicable, and that they are entailed to us and our descendants forever. Hence we can always congratulate ourselves upon their possession, and none else can. Outside of this personal, spiritual possession we may endeavor to aid others; but they are forever excluded from rising to the plane which we enjoy. This pride, while resulting in a selfish and narrow exclusiveness, is nevertheless founded on an intellectual error, and not on moral delinquency; and hence, when the light of truth falls upon it, it is dissipated, and the moral faculties, hitherto cramped by an error of belief, at once assert their right to full and free exercise. Such was the pride possessed by the Jew; such was the pride which was shattered through the visit of Peter to Cornelius. So long as the Jew relied upon what was peculiarly Jewish, — his descent from Abraham, his calling of God, that which was not transferable, — he

regarded all other men as essentially different from himself, and hence inferior. But so soon as it was demonstrated that the peculiarly Jewish element had been eliminated as a requirement of faith, every Jewish heart, dominated by love for God and man, was filled to overflowing, as it contemplated the wide field of humanity opened to receive the renewing mercies of God. Previously, the commission of our Lord, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," had been restricted in the minds of some, — to Jews only. Henceforth, it was extended to include the world, and none rejoiced more than those whose misgivings had been silenced by Peter, who glorified God saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." We cannot fail to notice the spirit of joy and thankfulness awakened by the dawning of the freshly revealed truth, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs with the Jew in the gospel. Rejoicing in the faith newly delivered unto them, they welcomed the intelligence that the spirit of life in Christ Jesus was to quicken not only Judea but the world.

Does not the conduct of these early Jewish Christians furnish an example which it would be well for us to imitate? The truth which they received is hardly new to us; but the hearty greeting with which they welcomed it is seldom seen. We may accord it an abstract, possibly a doubtful

recognition; but there is little spontaneity or naturalness in it. We maintain stoutly enough the principle that any and every human being may receive the gospel; but we are indifferent to sending it to them. Accustomed to the frequent utterance of the prediction, "that the Lord shall have the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his reward," we have no intellectual difficulty which prevents our acceptance of the universality of the gospel. Any failure to recognize, appreciate, and act on this truth is now due to moral causes, — to an indifference or dislike in sharing with others the faith which was first delivered to us. The true conception of a Christian involves the missionary spirit. Whatever strikes at this spirit aims a blow at Christian life. Paul's declaration: "I am a debtor both to the Jews and to the Greeks as much as in me is to preach the gospel," is the legitimate fruit of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus When this fruit no longer manifests itself, it must be because the life which produced it has been choked in its growth. The parables of our Lord furnish the evidence that the laws of spiritual life find their illustration in the lower orders of creation; that souls which refuse to bear the fruit naturally expected of them have failed of the end of their creation and are fit only to be cast out. What then shall our Lord say to us if, possessed of the only possible knowl-

edge which can redeem the world, we make no effort to impart it to others? Is it not our own insensibility to the knowledge of God in Christ which makes us insensible to the value which it possesses for others? "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." How can we speak in exalted terms of the value of Christian faith, and neglect the golden rule which would require our imparting it to others, if we have any such sense of its importance as we profess to have? Or, in quoting the parables of our Lord which speak of the kingdom of heaven as a pearl of great price; as a treasure hid in a field, which when a man findeth, he goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field, — when we cite these parables, have they become on our lips the mere repetition of words illustrating an experience of which we have no conception?

Is our confession of Christ, our thankfulness to God for salvation from the power and penalties of sin, for the gift of the spirit and eternal life, — is all this but the vain repetition of a faith which belonged to those who first professed it, but which on our lips is mere external adulation, which has no root in the heart, a stock of inherited phrases, grounded on custom more than on the love of God? If this be so, it is vain to criticise a lack of hearty Christian activity. It does not flow from such a source. But if these words of our Lord and of His

apostles do appeal to us, and even though our attitude toward them is not one of entire sympathy, but rather a prayer that we might become capable of appropriating such an experience to ourselves, — if this be so, we may consider with profit and advantage the causes which hinder our prayers, which obstruct the entrance of the light.

We have mentioned pride and selfishness as the most potent causes which tend to stupefy the natural interest which every Christian should feel in the salvation of others. It is to pride and selfishness, then, that we must make our appeal, addressing our attention to the folly and fatality which are generally admitted to be their inseparable accompaniments. There is a strong temptation to give no regard to another man's conduct or condition, excepting as it affects our own. The effect of his conduct or life upon himself influences us but little. One of the most frequently repeated arguments which we meet in favor of any general scheme of benevolence or education is an appeal to fear. Revolutionary fears are made use of to excite benevolence toward the dangerous classes of the community, in favor of educating the freeman, in favor of proselyting the Mormon. If this work is neglected, we are told it will be deeply regretted hereafter. Yet, at the same time, we hear it proclaimed from many platforms that fear is an unmanly motive for action, and that one of the

strongest objections to the Christian's faith is his belief in a God who appeals to the hearts and consciences of men through fear as well as love; and men proudly boast that they will not be coerced into obedience.

We see how slightly this objection holds in ordinary human pursuits. Men are afraid of not practising the duties of common humanity, whenever it can be shown to them that such neglect is dangerous; but before that is made evident, they will calmly ignore them. Again, when mal-treatment is proved unprofitable as well as dangerous, and selfishness is seen to defeat its own ends, a remedy is quickly provided. We must recognize the daily relations which we sustain to our fellows; and if we will not do it from love, we must do it from fear. This principle holds good in the higher relations of man to man. The same selfishness which restrains the kindly offices due to men capable of attaining the same level of human and humane accomplishment which we have reached, also exists to prevent the Christian from recognizing the claims which men have on him to bring to them the faith of the gospel. It would be as easy to demonstrate that it would inure to our benefit to spread throughout the world the salvation of which we have received, as it would be to prove that we shared the benefits resulting from the improved political, social, and sanitary science which others

have received from us. How can two live together except they be agreed? The world is growing smaller, and the action and reaction of nations living in contact, but not in agreement, is becoming sharper. Superstition, infidelity, heathenism, — are all grating against the Christian Church. Many times in the past has the pitiless, tireless friction continued, until Christian communities and Christian life have been ground out. The duty of preaching the gospel to every creature is a dangerous one to neglect. Through its omission, every creature may unite in one common cause against you. It was the conversion of the Roman Empire which stayed Roman persecution. It was the faith of princes and rulers which stayed the progress of the Inquisition, and drove back the ranks of spiritual tyranny. It is only through the world becoming Christian that Christians will be exempted from persecution. Many are the lines of argument which may be used to arouse the Christian from apathy toward the spiritual interests of others, — fears, lest his own heart become indurated through lack of exercise; fears, lest the responsibility for keeping silence be charged upon him; shame at falling behind in Christian effort; shame at the failure to recognize the sacrifices made from the foundation of the world to perpetuate the truth and deliver it intact to the present generation, and the duty which devolves upon us in our turn to deliver it to others.

God hath showed us that we should not call any man common or unclean; and yet we by no means receive this truth, with the alacrity which Peter showed, notwithstanding the circumstances under which we receive it are more favorable than were those of Peter. Jewish exclusiveness might plead in its defence an incomplete revelation. It was not revealed unto them, as it is unto us, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs of the promise of God in Christ through the gospel. We can no longer plead ignorance to justify prejudices. Our Christian or unchristian exclusiveness and antipathies rest solely on the baser parts of human nature, however much we may seek to nourish the delusion that they are the offspring of nobler qualities. The tree is known by its fruits; the presence of the gospel is attested likewise by its known and legitimate effects. The love of God is made apparent through the keeping of His commandments. Many are asking of the Lord to-day, "What is the chief commandment?" They have no difficulty in obtaining an answer, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and thy neighbor as thyself." But willing to justify themselves against an answer which strikes their conscience, they ask the second question, "Lord, who is my neighbor?" The story of the Good Samaritan drives the truth still nearer home. Those in need of assistance are your neigh-

bors. However afflicted in body or soul, the healing balm which has restored you will restore them. Their physical organism is similar. Their soul is similar. What has saved you will save them. Lack of sympathy with them indicates that humanity and faith are at a low ebb; that the instincts and principles have weakened, which alone guarantee sympathy with our fellowmen, enabling us to rejoice with them that do rejoice, to weep with them that weep.

To deny or ignore the capacity of other men to appreciate the preciousness of true human and divine relationships, is either to deny a manhood amply attested by history, or to deny the promises of God. Not only has God said "Thou shalt call no man common or unclean," but he has demonstrated it by the outpouring of His spirit upon all classes and conditions of men. The learned, the ignorant, the refined, the brutal, the savage, and the civilized have alike experienced the work of the spirit; have alike rejoiced in sins forgiven, and the hope of a glorious resurrection. The object-lessons of God are many and striking. The text itself furnishes a marked illustration of the readiness of the Gentile to receive the gospel. We often overlook the demand which springs up naturally in the human heart for the facts and truths which the gospel proclaims. A demand indeed due to the influence of the spirit, but which neither he who

feels it nor he who observes it can separate from the individual personality in which it manifests itself. But its existence is certified to the one by an experience similar to the man born blind, whose sight was restored by Christ: "Whereas I was blind; now I see." To the onlooker the fact of conversion is assured by the same evidence which convinced Peter: "Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the like gift as he gave unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I that I could withstand God?" We seldom think of the spirit of God preparing the hearts of men for the gospel. Too often we think of the spirit as following our efforts instead of being far in advance. "Look upon the fields," said our Lord; "they are white already to harvest. The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few." There are many of every age and nation eager, anxious to welcome the Christian's faith. Shall we ignore their appeals, scorn their protestations, doom them to the miseries of a pagan or Godless creed? The question awaits our answer. Has the love of God blinded and darkened our hearts that we should restrict the knowledge of it to ourselves?

There is an incident which speaks of an American Indian, who had left his people and travelled among the sights and sounds of civilization. Upon his return they questioned him, asking him what seemed the most wonderful of all the things

that he had seen. He answered, "When I stood in the church and saw the great congregation, and thought that they had been here four hundred years and had known all this, and had not come to tell us, — that seemed to me most wonderful." We may mock at such an experience as the childish sentimentalism of a savage; we may ride rough shod over those whose longing for what is purer and lovelier and nobler than anything they possess is uttered in language so simple and direct; we may look upon it as weakness; we may ignore, scorn, or pity it according to the humor of the hour, — but as certainly as that cry for help has fallen on our outward ear, so certainly shall we be judged for refusing to let the inward ear of sympathy listen. The heart of the heathen is being awakened; he is questioning, casting away his idols; he is able to appreciate Isaiah's scorn against those who hewed down cedars, burning part thereof in the fire, and of the residue thereof making a god. His interest in the Christian faith has been aroused, his appreciation of it increases. Himself the judge, he is ready to acknowledge that our Rock is better than his rock. We know that such is the condition of many. The cry of the man of Macedonia is echoed through the world: "Come over and help us." That was sufficient proof to direct Paul's footsteps; it should satisfy us. The inarticulate, tremulous cry for help, which voices

the hunger of the soul, which speaks of hopes and aspirations longing to be satisfied, — shall we turn away from such appeals? You who have eaten and drunken at the table of the Lord; who have been filled with His bounty; who have never known a hunger and thirst for a righteousness as yet unrevealed, — will you turn from those who, like the Syro-Phœnician woman, beg the crumbs of spiritual blessing which fall from your table? The bread of life which lies in bountiful, wasteful excess before you would restore the breath of life to many a parched and famished soul; would carry joy, happiness, and peace to many a burdened and despairing heart. "Cast thy bread upon the waters, and after many days it shall return to thee."

As we think of these things we must recognize that the command of our Lord, "Go ye," represents the essence of Christian activity. He sends: we should go. Those that are sent are apostles, messengers, missionaries. It is not one, but every Christian who is sent. And have we not reason to believe that the more faithfully we fulfil the commission laid on us, going forth in the power of the Lord and strong in his might, the more welcome will the note of recall sound in our ears: "Come ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"?

VI.

THANKFULNESS.

VI.

THANKFULNESS.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. . . . In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence. . . . And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sin, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world; according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. . . . But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. — Eph. i. 3, 7, 8; ii. 1, 2, 4–6.

Of these verses, the first strikes the keynote of the remarks which we have to offer, while the others will be considered only as they reflect light upon the first. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is an ascription of grateful praise to God. Thankfulness is of the essence of true worship; it is the resultant of all right views of our relation to God and God's relation to us. This is true of what is termed Natural

Theology; it is pre-eminently true of Christian theology.

For the ordinary operations of God's providence, for fruitful seasons filling our hearts with joy and gladness, for a well ordered state, for national peace, — it would be natural that for such blessings as these devout men of every nation should express their gratitude in thanksgiving. But when we consider the broader and deeper interpretation which is given to the ordinary providence of God through the Christian faith, together with the realm of new truth and hitherto unknown conceptions of God, made manifest by the same faith, it is then, and then only, that our hearts and minds are furnished with the thoughts and emotions necessary to render to God the deepest and truest praise of which redeemed humanity is capable.

There are three elements which determine our gratitude to a deliverer, whether he be a savior in great or small things: —

1. That from which he has saved us.
2. That unto which he has saved us.
3. The cost to himself of our salvation.

Let us consider then the work of God, our Saviour, under these three aspects, — though, for the sake of convenience in discussion, we may unite the first and second points of view, since they have a reciprocal relation and are naturally bound together. It is difficult to distinguish between a loss

which a man escapes and the benefit which is brought to him by any saving act. To state that a man is saved from death implies that he is saved unto life. To state that he was saved unto life implies that he was saved from death.

The close juxtaposition of these thoughts is frequent throughout the Scriptures, and it occurs in the text before us. "But God . . . even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." Dead in sins is the condition from which we have been rescued; and, secondly, there is the necessary sequence of this condition, — the judgment which awaits it, from which we have been rescued. "Tribulation and anguish," says Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans (ii. 9), "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil; of the Jew, first, and also of the Gentile."

Our redemption, then, consists in a two-fold salvation, — salvation from a sinful state and salvation from a lost destiny. Let us endeavor to enter more fully into the meaning of this statement. Let us consult the testimony of witnesses,— men who have felt the power of sin and who have trembled at its fatal consequences, — and then let us turn to the objective testimony of history, the change in communities which has been brought about by their passage from death to life.

Talleyrand, Prince of Benevento, in the state; Minister of Foreign Affairs under Napoleon and

Louis XVIII; in the Church, a holder of ecclesiastical benefices; agent general for the clergy; Bishop of Autun; a man of commanding ability, yet dissolute in character and unprincipled in diplomacy, — has left us this testimony to the worth of his life as he had spent it: "Behold, eighty-three years have passed away! What cares! What agitations! What anxieties! What ill will! What sad complications! And all without other results except great fatigue of body and mind, a profound sentiment of discouragement for the future and disgust for the past."

To cite another confession of the ruinous issues of sin, let us visit the sick room of Voltaire during his last illness. When he first felt the stroke which resulted in his death he sent at once for a priest that he might be reconciled to the Church. His infidel flatterers he cursed to their faces, exclaiming, "Begone! it is you who have brought me to my present condition. Leave me, I say; begone! What a wretched glory is this which you have gained for me!" For two months he was tortured with agony of mind. At times he would plead, "O Christ! O Lord Jesus!" and then turning away his face, he would cry out that he was abandoned of God and man.

To give another illustration which furnishes even a more explicit avowal of the wages of sin, let us listen to Sir Francis Newport, — a man who in

early life was trained in the truths of the gospel; but in mature years entered upon a career of infidelity and dissipation. At last, smitten with a fatal disease, he was awakened to a sense of truth, but to truth which for him was full only of horror. To an infidel companion who had endeavored to dispel his painful thoughts, he replied, "That there is a God, I know, because I continually feel the effects of his wrath; that there is a hell, I am equally certain, having received an earnest of my inheritance there already in my breast; that there is a natural conscience, I now feel with horror and amazement, being continually upbraided by it with my impieties, and all my sins brought to my remembrance. Why God has marked me out for his vengeance rather than you or any other of our acquaintance, I presume is because I have been more religiously educated and have done greater despite to the spirit of grace. . . . You imagine me melancholy or distracted. I wish I were either; but it is part of my judgment that I am not. . . . See, then, I have despised my Maker and denied my Redeemer till my iniquity was ripe for vengeance; and the just judgment of God overtook me when my security was the greatest and the checks of my conscience were the least."

Such confessions on the part of men who had refused the knowledge of God which was open to them, who had closed their eyes to the light which

was shining upon them, afford a striking picture of the wrath of God, which the apostle predicts as coming on those who, when they knew God, glorified Him not as God; and even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, who, knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

The commission to the apostles was to preach the gospel — the glad tidings — to every creature (Mark xvi. 15). There was none righteous, — no, not one, for all had sinned (Rom. iii., 10, 24), and the wrath of God was declared from heaven against all such. The certainty of judgment was declared against every man that doeth evil. The sad experience of the men whose history we have just narrated will be infallibly sealed to us if we obey not God; if we believe not in Him whom He hath sent. There are but two classes of men recognized as standing before the judgment seat of Christ, — the saved and the lost; and the condition of one, depicted in weeping and gnashing of teeth, vividly represents the state from which the others have been rescued. Gather together in one the Biblical representations of the final judgment, and contrast the agonizing picture on the one hand with the blessedness and fulness of joy on the other, and it will impart new fulness and strength to our views of salvation.

But forgiveness from the punishment of sin is one aspect of salvation; deliverance from present sinfulness, from the power and dominion of sin, is another. Let us now look at the question broadly, — not taking our lesson from individuals, but from types and classes of men, and by comparison gain clearer views of this second aspect of salvation. Generally speaking, there have been but two gospels advocated in the world since the birth of Christ, — one, freedom from sin; the other, freedom to sin. These have always been antagonistic to each other; and while at times their currents have been mingled, yet each has been kept sufficiently distinct from the other to enable us to judge of the tendencies of each by their varying results. It will be admitted that, however much evil has resulted from the perversion of Christianity, that, nevertheless, the moral superiority of the modern over the ancient world and the consequent amelioration and improvement in the lot of mankind has been due to the influences which emanated from the life and death of Christ. To understand this let us dwell for a moment on two or three of the most eventful periods of history, considering how far the outward circumstances and happiness of mankind have been dependent upon the conformity or non-conformity of their principles and conduct to the teaching of Christ, and judging by this whether it is of small moment for the Christless to become Christian, — for those to be

quickened with Christ who were once dead in trespasses and sins.

Let us take for our first outlook the earliest contact of Christians with heathendom; the dead wall which was then raised against the vices and oppressions of the most civilized government of the time, — a wall which subject and emperor alike endeavored to undermine, but under whose shadow they were at last forced to rest.

Heathen and Christian testimony concur in representing the degeneracy of morals under pagan rule and their resurrection in connection with the spread of Christian truth. Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, asserts that he can discover nothing among them but a bloodless ceremonial (Merivale vii. 291), and a covenant to abstain from crime. Tertullian (Apol. 7, 9) offers the statement that, notwithstanding the sudden surprises and betrayals of Christian meetings, they have never been found guilty of the crimes alleged against them, and he arraigns the Roman world for persistency in the crimes of which they accuse others. It was not immorality, but refusal to obey idolatrous imperial edicts which led to the early persecutions, — adherence to a religion unrecognized and condemned by the state was the Christian's only fault. This loyalty to their faith (or steadfast, inflexible obstinacy, as Pliny terms it) but betrayed the sudden rise of moral forces which would speedily become effectual in leavening the

sodden mass of existing humanity, — forces which would bring emperors and empires under their control, — and exhibit in changed and modified systems of law the healing influence which had begun its work upon the hearts and souls of men.

The laws of Constantine, Theodosius, and Justinian reflect the growing spirit of Christianity. To enumerate examples, we find that a merciful and humane legislation wrought a change upon the institution of slavery. The crimes and debasing influences engendered by it were greatly lessened. Bloody contests felt a like influence; and they were first discountenanced, then abolished. Licentious shows were surrounded with restrictions and limitations. The exposure and abandonment of children was discountenanced, and its baleful results mitigated. A new era in prison discipline was inaugurated. Branding was forbidden. Judges were charged to visit the jails lest corrupt keepers should refuse humanity to the imprisoned. The time was also marked by the beginning of true Christian charity in the erections of hospitals and asylums. Such was the outward, visible effect of Christianity on the Roman Empire. They do not accurately gauge the faith or practice of the Church itself, but they show the restraining influence which the Church had now gained over humanity at large. Tyranny, cruelty, and vice must now bend their heads. Their time of unlimited sway has passed. If such were the effects

of Christianity outside the Church, how much greater were its effects within! If it had changed and restrained public opinion, still more had it controlled and dominated the individual life. Purity and love and hope in the Christian were contrasted with the chill which had settled on the heathen's natural affections and with the despair which had settled on his thoughts for the future.

Is it necessary to follow further examples to prove the Christian's debt to Christ for the change wrought on the face of society, for the change wrought in himself? We might pursue the course of history after the fall of the Roman Empire, showing the power of Christianity to check the coarseness of the vigorous barbarian as well as to elevate the subjects of a corrupt civilization. The elevation of woman; the modifications imposed upon the custom of private vengeance; the discouragement laid upon private wars; changes in the administration of justice; the decline in slavery and serfdom, and the spread of broader and deeper feelings of humanity, — such is the trend of development due to the teachings of Christ.

Let us not, however, confuse the upward progress of generations with the change in the individual soul. Humanity is an abstraction, but men are not. We thank God for the improvement in society, in which improvement we share; but we thank Him first and most because we ourselves are quickened

and redeemed by Him; and it is only as the history of men and nations shows to us what we are without Him that we thank Him the more.

The deeper our insight into the benefits conferred by salvation, the greater will be our appreciation of them and the greater our thankfulness to Him who is the author of every good and perfect gift. But if we consider the benefits only, we shall miss from our harmonies of praise the chord which sounds the deepest note of praise in earthly or in heavenly music. "Worthy the lamb that died," they cry, "to be exalted thus." "Worthy the lamb," our lips reply, "for he was slain for us." The cost of our salvation, the price of our redemption, as the fullest, most complete manifestation of the divine love, as underlying and conditioning all else, as the centre and foundation of the Christian's joy on earth and hope of heaven, ever has been and ever will be the most valued, the most adored possession of the Christian Church; and this not merely as an outward gift, but because it brings most clearly to view the hidden feelings of our heavenly Father's heart; because it lays bare the love of God as it had never been laid bare before; because it enables us to say *our* Father.

"The eternal power and divinity of God," says the apostle (Rom. i. 20), was exhibited to the heathen world in the material universe; His goodness (Acts xiv. 17) was displayed in the giving of

rain and fruitful seasons; but His love is measured only by the gift of His Son. "He that spared not His own son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. viii. 32). Christ is above and before all things. It is natural that it should be so. Man values most what costs him most; and he prizes the kind offices and gifts of friends as much by their cost as by their usefulness.

When David wished to sacrifice on the threshing floor of Araunah, the Jebusite, he refused to accept the necessities of sacrifice which were proffered him, and said, "Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer unto the Lord of that which doth cost me nothing" (2 Sam. xxiv. 24). In this David followed the spirit of the Mosaic sacrifices, which required that offerings to God should be of a man's own possessions, and such as had required care and nurture. Man must not come before his Maker with gifts that had cost him nothing. We thus discover in the commandments of God and written in the instructive judgments of the human heart that love is measured by self-sacrifice. The greater the sacrifice, the greater the love which lies behind it. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John xv. 13). No other sacrifice is so conspicuous, so entire, no other possesses such unmistakable significance. We are impressed with

an exchange of station between those occupying positions of unequal dignity and power; and in proportion to the contrast of position, the more sensible we are of the sacrifice which one has made to the other, and the more readily we respond in instant and natural expressions of praise.

Applying this to our relation to Christ, thought, imagination, loses itself in its attempts to express the transcendent glory which the creation of God ascribes to Him who, being the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person, "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ramson for many" (Matt. xx. 28). The Son of Man who died to save the ungodly, who died to save sinners, "who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live in righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Pet. ii. 24).

Contrasts, my Christian friends, are ever a strong method of stirring our innermost nature and awakening our deepest thought. Small differences lose their interest to us, small sacrifices are readily forgotten; but great contrasts which appear as breaks in the even strata of daily thought and experience excite our interest and become the objects of our study. Humanity rushes in headlong haste to gain the view of dizzy heights or dizzy depths, and speculation grows weary in searching out the causes which have raised the mountain or sunk the plain.

But we should remember that there are heights and depths other than those of the material world. We speak of our higher nature and our lower nature, of spiritual life and worldly life, of a world lost, of a world saved; but the strongest contrast which we can possibly present is that between fallen man and the Son of God. It is as though mountain heights had left their proud eminence of grandeur and of glory and had descended to the level of the plain, that the plain in its turn might rise to the height and majesty of the mountain. And shall we be brought face to face with such marvellous changes in the spiritual world and not ask the reason of them? Shall we contemplate the varied surface of our world and write its history in terms of subterranean fire and refuse to scrutinize the upheavals and depressions of the spiritual world? Or shall we, viewing the wonders of our moral government, seek to discover for moral effects moral causes? And when we behold the Lord of the universe becoming its servant; when we behold the God and Father of all giving up His only begotten son to ignominy and death, shall we not look for its explanation in the hidden fires which burn within our heavenly Father's heart, and find in the greatest sacrifice which heaven has made to earth a revelation of the infinite love which moulds and sways the universe?

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that

He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John iv. 10). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. i. 3).

THE END.

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